

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

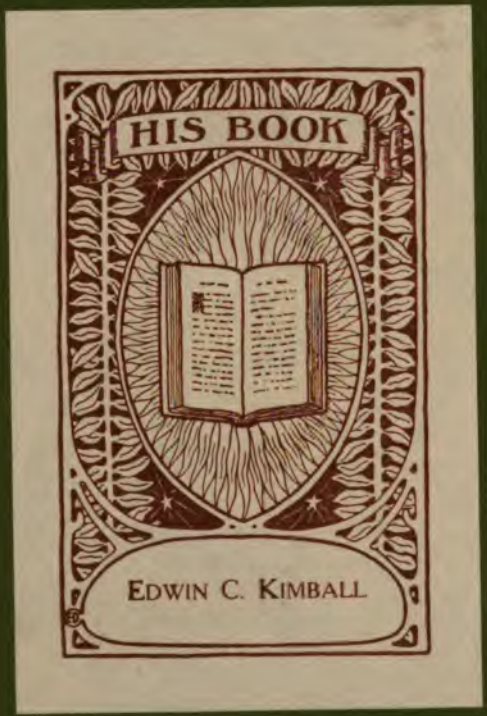
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

HN 2V39 %

A JOURNEY TO NATURE

J. P. MOWBRAY

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

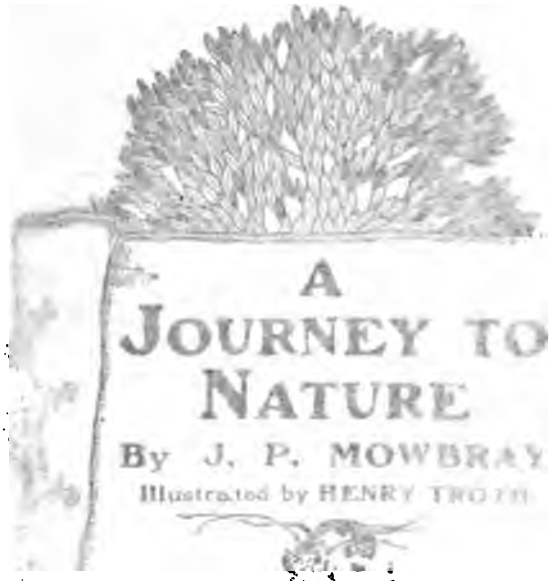
Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



BUT, AS I LOOKED AT THE HANDSOME MAID, WITH HER ELBOW ON THE OLD HAND-RAIL,
AND THE WESTERN SUN GLORIFYING HER BRONZE HAIR.

Digitized by Google



A JOURNEY TO NATURE

By J. P. MOWBRAY

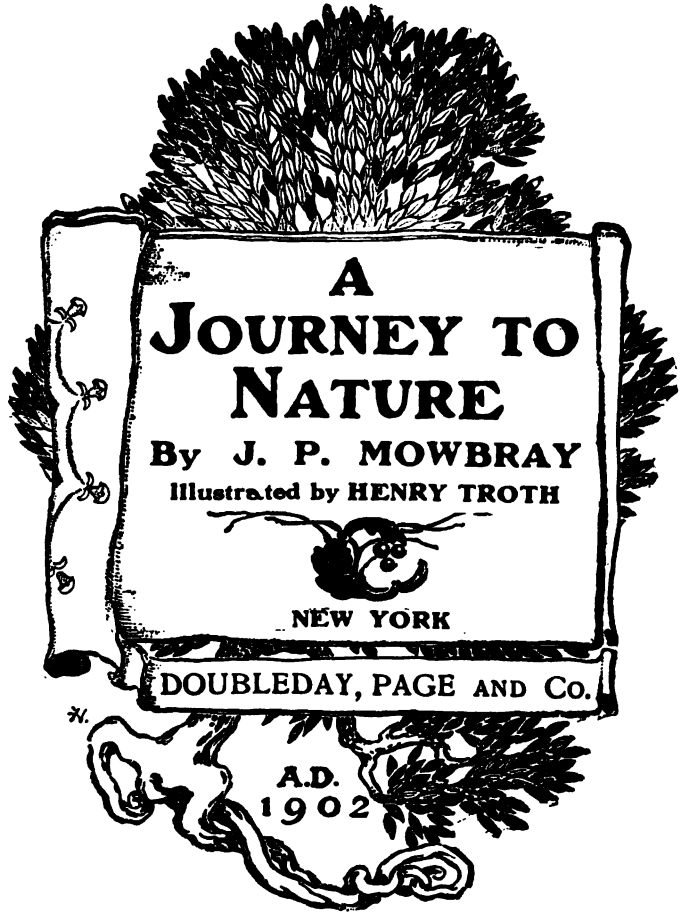
Illustrated by HENRY TROTH

NEW YORK
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE
A.D
1902

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

KF 2355



43*219

COPYRIGHT, 1900, 1901, BY
THE NEW YORK EVENING POST COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1901, BY
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & CO.

Digitized by Google

INTRODUCTION

THE papers in this book were originally contributed to the *New York Evening Post*, where they elicited a printed desire for their preservation in book form. Written at intervals, with very slight continuity of narrative, for weekly readers, all of whom could hardly be expected to follow them consecutively, they were necessarily repetitious and explanatory in spots, and required rewriting and editing when collected in book form for continuous reading. Those papers therefore have been specially prepared for this volume, new matter having been introduced and much that was explanatory to weekly readers having been eliminated.

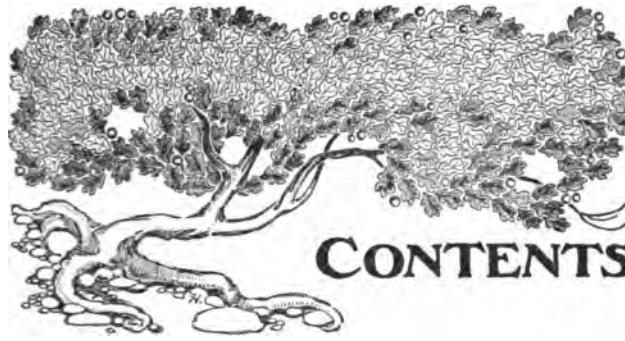
The personages introduced are taken from life, and are put down with a free hand as the writer saw them at the time, one of them still coloured by the fantasy she evoked. The sketches neces-

Digitized by Google

sarily vary with the varying moods which one brings with him to Nature, and which sometimes colour and distort Nature herself. But if in their entirety they convey in any small degree the author's slowly matured conviction that external Nature has a lesson of obedience and love behind all her aberrations and laws, and whispers that "God is in his world" to those who are receptive and attentive, they will have accomplished the only purpose that the author had in his mind.

J. P. M.

Digitized by Google



CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Page

Scared to Life 1

CHAPTER II

Living Backwards 11

CHAPTER III

The Killing of Marmion 31

CHAPTER IV

Haying Time 47

CHAPTER V

Dumb Intimacies 61

CHAPTER VI

A Summer's Pippin 70

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER VII

Page

Listen to the Mocking-bird 79

CHAPTER VIII

The Convalescence of a Cracked Heart . . . 89

CHAPTER IX

The Light in a Dark Cell 99

CHAPTER X

The Glory of the Way 109

CHAPTER XI

On a Porch 120

CHAPTER XII

A September Chill 140

CHAPTER XIII

Mature Truants 151

CHAPTER XIV

The Baptism of Dirt 162

CHAPTER XV

A Fringed Gentian 181

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XVI

Page

Stramonium 192

CHAPTER XVII

Chestnuts by the Way 203

CHAPTER XVIII

Out in the Cold 213

CHAPTER XIX

Wood Fires 226

CHAPTER XX

High Winds 236

CHAPTER XXI

Indian Summer 256

CHAPTER XXII

Trailing Juniper 267

CHAPTER XXIII

Winter Skies 283

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER XXIV

Page

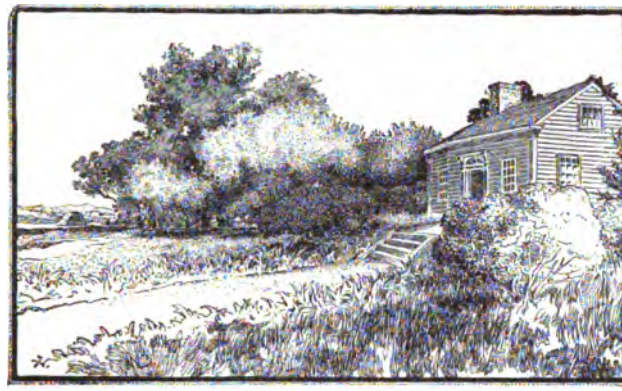
Snowed In 293

CHAPTER XXV

The Return of the Exiles 304



Digitized by Google



List Of Illustrations

"But, as I looked at the handsome maid" . . Frontispiece

Facing page

"The big fireplace at the end of the room" . . 12

"Besides, just now he was caring more for that yellow dog" 14

" . . . down winding, dusty roads" . . . 24

" . . . Gabe Hotchkiss split my wood" . . . 46

"Gabe had two teams in the field" 56

"The basin was not full enough to run over" . . 60

"I could sit and watch him saw wood" . . . 74

"I was lying on the grass, attending strictly" . . 80

Digitized by Google

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

"... were the labourers stacking the corn in the fields" 156

"The beautiful mountain stream ran". 164

"We drew up at a long, low house" 168

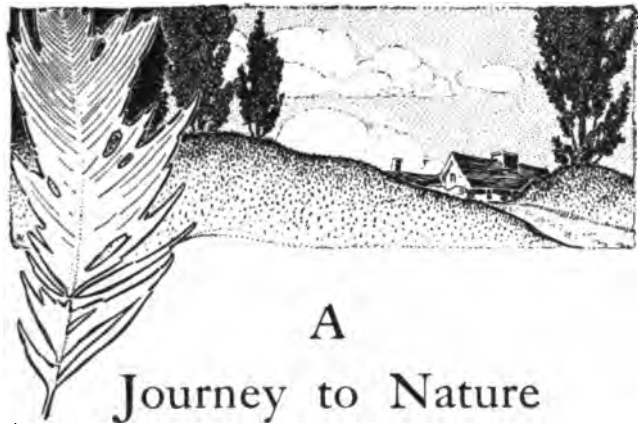
"I looked at the beautiful specimens" 188

"... I walked in another direction, and bawled out a stave of 'The Brave Old Oak'" 248

"... along which the stately cedars and hemlocks" . 276

"The stark tree stems with the afternoon sun" . . . 284

Digitized by Google



A Journey to Nature

CHAPTER I

SCARED TO LIFE

TO pass suddenly out of the very tempest and agony of life into the dead calm of another existence; to stop all the rioting faculties at full speed and go quietly away to vegetating dreams, is an experience that not many men have had, and the recital of it may not be without interpretative edification to some of my fellows.

I went out for a year. I could not have severed myself more completely from my habitat and the myriad points of contact with my kind, if I had become what Coleridge calls "a blessed ghost." I cut my species dead and departed this life as absolutely as was possible for a man to do without severing an artery or blowing his brains out.

Digitized by Google

I turned my back on the world. Not to rail against it, for it must be acknowledged that I was very fond of it, but to get out of myself. I was neither a Timon nor a Thoreau. Just the ordinary headlong egoist who is living at the top of his speed. I exiled myself to forget myself, and I found something. Do you know what it was? It was myself.

One day as I was coming out of the Stock Exchange when that maelstrom was in full race and when I was in a sort of concentrated paroxysm of suspense,—I got a warning. It was like a stroke of lightning. Without premonition or explanation, it seemed as if the mental tension snapped suddenly. I was hurrying to my office when I was swiftly and softly struck with sudden death. I put it that way because I know of no other phrase that will answer exactly to my sensation at the moment. My relation to the rest of the world broke off, and a frightened consciousness seemed to be crying out—what's that? I recall my interpretation of the sensation, and it was that an iron door had fallen with a clang and cut me off forever. I had run up unthinkingly against Eternity there on the curb in front of the Exchange.

It is at such moments that we measure time not by its successions but by its packed simultaneousness.

I was not physiologically expert enough to know what had happened, but I readily fitted a current phrase to it.—Heart failure, I said. And that accommodating explanation conveys no idea

Digitized by Google

of the sudden recession of all the tides of life in a storm. I must have been pretty thoroughly frightened. Some glimmering recollection there is of somebody accosting me by name and jocularly asking me if I was sunstruck and then passing on in the human flux. By some phantasmal and quick prescience, I saw the Secretary mounting the rostrum in the Exchange; there was a picture of momentary hush; all hats came off, and I heard my name called. It was coupled with the word "Suddenly." Then back went the hats again, the roar began, and I was disposed of.

However, the mysterious organ, of which I had hitherto been profoundly ignorant, made a spasmodic jump or two, and concluded to resume business, with what I thought was a staggering protest, and I found myself in my office, wondering for the first time in my life at the unnecessary headlong nature of messengers and typewriters, and showing that a good scare makes a man incoherent, by replying to the startled girl who asked me if anybody was dead, "Yes; I am."

Then I was rattling up Broadway in a cab, saying to myself with consummate imbecility, "Keep cool, for heaven's sake — don't excite yourself." But by the time I had put my smoking-jacket on in my bachelor quarters, and had sent a messenger for the doctor, I had recovered a little of my routine indifference. When the dear old man's knuckles struck my door and he pushed it open, I was walking the floor, smoking; whereupon he

Digitized by Google

threw his cane upon the table recklessly, and, drawing up his portly form, said: —

"Well, confound your urgent impudence! I expected to find you breathing your last."

"Perhaps I am, Doctor," I said. "I had an attack on the street of heart failure. I want instant advice."

"Heart failure?" he shouted. "Is that all? Confound you; I thought you had the influenza. Suppose you open that window. I'll have heart failure myself if I breathe this atmosphere."

"Do you think it would be safe for me in my present condition?" I asked.

"Not only safe, but preferable."

I opened the sash. It was an early spring afternoon, and the sound of a newsboy's voice came mellowed by the distance, as if from a world I had left behind. He was calling a late edition.

"You'll excuse me a moment, Doctor," I said, as I rang my call again. "I'd like to see the latest quotations."

He looked at me curiously. "There's a break in the market?" he asked.

"Slump," I replied.

"Are you in deep?"

"Up to my ears. But it's my health that's worrying me." Then I described my experience as well as I could, and presently he had my coat off, and I was under his professional manipulation. He called it taking a look at my assets — hardly thought I could make an assignment, and various cheerful remarks of that kind, while his cool thumb

Digitized by Google

and finger were poking about, and his warm ear was trying to catch what he called the crack of doom. When finally he sat down in the chair before me, he disregarded my anxiety, and ran on in pretty much the same way.

"You're a lively lot of boys down there on the street. Your mother's alive yet, I believe."

"Yes."

"How old is she?"

"Seventy-six."

"How old was your father when he died?"

"Seventy-four. Come to the point, Doctor. What chance have I got?"

He looked at me a moment very much as if he hesitated to tell me the truth. Then he said: "Well, my boy, it's a toss up whether you live to be seventy-five or drop dead within six months."

I felt a nerve in my face twitch, and he went on.

"I suppose I ought to congratulate you. It isn't every one who has the privilege of going down bow first, all sails set, at full speed, without committing suicide."

I asked him plainly if he could help my chances.

"No," he said bluntly. "It would be an impertinence for me to disturb the intimacy which you have established with sudden death. Besides, mortuary neatness and despatch have been very much maligned. Some men are meant to live right up to the stopping point, take all there is of life, and then exit quickly and quietly without any fuss. It's quite characteristic of the business

Digitized by Google

man of our era. It's what somebody has called eliminating the corporal superfluities."

"Then I am liable to die at any moment, Doctor?"

"Why, of course. But you needn't preen yourself. It's a very common privilege in Wall Street. You prefer it, don't you? I've seen a good deal of dying, and I must say that as a rule most of the attempts are tiresome bites at a cherry."

"Doctor," I said, "you will pardon me, I don't quite take your view of it. I prefer to linger and suffer a little. I sent for you because you are a doctor and not a philosopher. What can you do for me?"

"Nothing, except to give the undertaker a clean bill of voluntary *felo de se*. There's only one thing will save you."

"Ah, what is it?"

"A miracle."

"Good heavens, Doctor!"

"Yes, sir. Perhaps you have heard the dynamic asses of this world say that a man cannot lift himself by his own waistband. I suppose it's true. When you can do that, you will live to be seventy-five, if that's any comfort to you."

"You are brutally frank. I suppose I must submit to my doom, but I didn't send for you to sentence me."

"Sentence you? Confound it, you sent for me to make a monkey of me. What would you think of a man who ate cyanide of mercury every

Digitized by Google

morning and sent for me to give him some medicine that would prolong his life?"

"You cannot give me any treatment — is that it?"

"Yes, I can. I can put the whole pharmacopœia into one word and give it to you, but you will not take it. It's bitter, but it might cure you."

"Give it to me."

"Stop."

"Do you mean give up business?"

"Give up everything. Stop living for a year, and live. If you don't want to die, let Wall Street die. You cannot both live together."

"Am I to understand that I can avert an organic disaster with care?"

"No. You are bringing it on with care. Stop caring. Go away. Forget — and you will lift yourself by your waistband out of an early grave. Where's that boy of yours?"

"He is at school."

"School at seven! Atrocious! So, you had to smash him, too."

"I couldn't very well take care of him when his mother died, so I put him in a comfortable private home school."

"When did you see him?"

I had to think. "Three or four weeks ago."

"Great Scott — that fine little fellow handed over to orphanage to accommodate Wall Street!"

"Oh, you mistake. I am working for his future."

Digitized by Google

"By destroying your own. That's the devil's logic."

This treatment resulted somewhat as a counter-irritant will. The Doctor had cuffed me professionally. When he went away I began to resent it. Besides, the farther I receded from the original point of shock, the less dangerous it appeared to be, and the events that had been momentarily suspended began to press up again. Telegrams, special messengers, urgent calls, came out of the world to which I belonged. It is not easy to step outside of a crisis when you are a part of it. A man does not suddenly resolve to become meditative in a mob. I had sufficient resolution to back out of a dinner party and send word to the office that I would not be down for a day or two. I was already compromising. I would slack up for a few days, and then go at it again more guardedly. This in effect was — to use Wendell Phillips's phrase — a weak determination not to commit suicide, but to jump only half way down Niagara.

To be absolutely candid, neither physical warning nor medical advice would have broken the nexus of my life at that time, but the Doctor had dropped one bit of acid into his advice that was to eat away the chain that I could not break. That word "orphanage" laid hold of some part of my system with a rankling persistency. It was as if the Doctor had left his scalpel sticking in my soul. "Where is that boy?" kept tolling in me like a deep, questioning bell.

The next morning I was again flying up town

Digitized by Google

in a cab. I arrived at a shabby genteel home unexpectedly. The woman who let me in intimated very plainly by her manner that it was irregular to come at that hour. She ought to have been forewarned. I brushed her away with my sudden fatherhood. "He was in the class room," she said, with an air of finality, as if the class room were a bar to fathers. But she must have seen in my face some gleams of a sudden and irresistible voracity that would be dangerous to tamper with, for she led the way with a grim and silent protest, and I suddenly saw eight or ten little fellows in a row on a bench. It seemed to me then that I had never before encountered such a petrifaction of all the natural functions of childhood. The children appeared to be in some kind of a vise, meant to squeeze them into indistinguishable uniformity. But, as my eye ran along that human gamut, it met one inscrutable note that made every string in me vibrate. One of the faces was mine. The moment it saw me, the big, blue eyes opened wide, a pair of lips involuntarily cried, "Papa," and a pair of little arms seemed to stretch across the space and clutch at me all over.

I took him away in spite of protests, and when the matron asked me with an utterly unanswerable superiority what I was going to do with him, I crushed her with a bravado that could only come out of Wall Street. "We are going to play pinochle," I said.

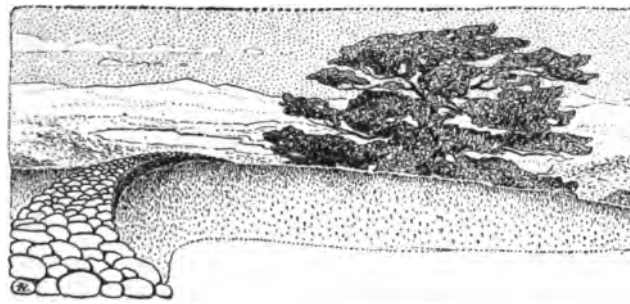
He and I had the flat to ourselves that night. I never had so much fun in my life. They must

Digitized by Google

have heard us on the floor below and wondered. After he had said his prayers in his night-gown, he asked me if I wasn't going to say mine, and I think I blushed. Just before he went to sleep, he put his arm softly over to see if I was there, and then said tremulously, "Papa, are you going away in the morning?" I turned over, kissed him on the cheek, and with that utter imbecility that is pristine, I said, "Charlie, if you love me as I love you, no knife can cut our love in two."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER II

LIVING BACKWARDS

WHEN I made up my mind to back out of my environment, I encountered some poignant experiences which it is not worth while to narrate in detail. It is enough if I can make clear the resultant lesson of it all. Several impulses and desires, deep embedded, combined to make me step clean out of one habitat into another, and having taken the step, I had too much obduracy of character to go back. You have heard of men turning a new leaf. In my case it was no mere ornamental figure of speech. If you will permit me to use a better phrase,—not irreverently,—I was born again, and like all births it had its pangs, but I emerged into a new world. That is the interesting part of it. The Doctor had declared that I could not lift myself by my own waistband, and therefore must die. I objected to dying. Somehow it hurt me to be knocked down in that manner, and when I looked

Digitized by Google

at my boy, only eight years old, the idiotic idea occurred to me that perhaps he might help me to lift myself by my own waistband.

One morning in late May we found ourselves, with our bridges burnt, standing with a yellow dog in front of a weather-beaten hut one hundred miles from Wall Street. It was so early that I could feel the wet wire grass through my thin shoes. I looked at the dilapidated house and wondered at my temerity. Then the two fellows who are always squabbling in one's subconsciousness began their debate.

"So," says one of them — a kind of Mephisto — "you have made up your mind to live in that hovel, have you? Perhaps you think you were built for it."

"No," says the other fellow, "I'm going to be rebuilt for it."

"Well, it's a mediæval funk — blank cowardice — crass sentimentalism. You cannot change your skin by changing your geography. You will commit suicide before the year is out."

"All right," said the other, setting his teeth, "suicide it must be then. I've got a little acrobatic feat to perform just to prove to a doctor that somewhere in the past I had a Puritan ancestor who died on the church steps with a gun in one hand and a hymn-book in the other. I can live on raw turnips and spring water when my mind is made up."

This was the bravado of the will, and even while it was flourishing I was conscious that I

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



THE BIG FIREPLACE AT THE END OF THE ROOM HAD SOME FAGGOTS PILED READY FOR LIGHTING.

Digitized by Google

wo
had
I
the
lem
ask
of t
in S
a sp
crop
"
face
the
I
was
The
after
wood
sweet
phœ
intim
was
Ther
chairs
book
on it,
over
The
some
I s
home
quart

Digitized by Google

would give the hovel and the two big boxes that had been set down at its door for a cocktail.

I asked the two men who had driven us and the boxes up where I could get some ice and a lemon. They looked at each other as if I had asked them for a French menu. "Ice?" said one of them. "You might git some at the butcher's in Spelldown. It's four miles and a half. There's a spring in the medder yonder, but the lemon crop ain't very good this year."

"That's so," said his companion, wiping his face with his shirt-sleeves, "the potato bugs hurt the young lemons awfully last season."

I learned sooner or later that this kind of irony was in the air like the smell of the skunk cabbage. The inside of the hovel was not so dilapidated after all. There were only two rooms and a woodshed. But it was clean and bright and sweet, and scented airs wandered through it. A phœbe-bird sat on the sill of a low window and intimated that I was impertinent. Everything was in humble and homely shipshape order. There were two shakedowns, a pine table, camp-chairs, a Quaker rocker, some trunks, a little book-shelf, a dresser with thick cups and saucers on it, and a small writing-table under the window, over which a chintz curtain was flapping lazily. The big fireplace at the end of the room had some faggots piled ready for lighting.

I sat down at the window, and surveying the homely surroundings, thought of my bachelor quarters in the city, and had to press my hand

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



BESIDES, JUST NOW HE WAS CARING MORE FOR THAT YELLOW DOG THAN FOR ANYTHING ELSE ON EARTH.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

in this hovel, and ate strawberries and cream and shortcake, there where that pine table stood, while the hail was pattering on the roof. No, I can be a Rousseau to you, curious reader, but not to Charlie. It is difficult to be as candid as Rousseau without being as objectionable. Charlie could not understand if I told him that the ghost of an old sweetheart had come back again with me to the hovel and was going to eat strawberries and cream again at that same table.

Besides, just now he was caring more for that yellow dog than for anything else on earth, or perhaps in heaven, for that matter. That cur was the only living thing that welcomed us when we came to the station at Spelldown. She seemed to sniff our predetermined vagabondage, and began to wag a most familiar reciprocity, that said, "I am with you, boys." So audaciously did she claim a prior acquaintance with Charlie in some other state of existence, that I gave a boy a dollar for her, and she wig-wagged with boisterous and unmistakable manumission all the way up to our destination. Before she had got there Charlie had named her "Samson" with reference to some dog ideal in his story-book, and a day or two later I had to correct it, according to the facts, there being indubitable evidence that the cur did not belong to the Samsonian gender. So I suggested as more appropriate to her character the name of "Delilah," and Charlie, with the felicity of blue-pencil infancy, instantly converted it into "Lilah" for all time.

Digitized by Google

I pulled the Quaker rocker outside the door, lit my brier-wood pipe, and tried to make myself believe that I felt like Cowper's Selkirk. But the attempt was frustrated by the arrival of Griselle. She came over the northeast pasture hill, in starched muslin, and brought Gabe Hotchkiss with her. Gabe was her uncle — a weazened Rip Van Winkle, who would split my wood, haul my supplies once a week, and, if I said so, sleep in my woodshed, and fetch me some trout and dace occasionally from the Cluny milldam, between my cottage and the "Folly." Against this practical and case-hardened rustic Griselle was like a musk pink against a stone heap. I wanted to call her Phyllis, and I believe I have mentioned her in my diary as "Buttermilk and Daisies." But I soon found out that she had taught district school in winter and played the melodeon in the Reformed Church somewhere. She could come over and get Charlie's breakfast in the morning. Charlie's — mark that. Of course Charlie and I were going to run two tables. Having settled this, she abandoned me to Gabe, and went out on the wire grass to make Charlie's acquaintance.

Finally she insisted on taking Charlie over to the "Folly" and showing him the milldam. In a moment of weakness I consented, and was then thrown upon my own resources for the rest of the day. I tried to fill the time out with petty industry. I got out the few books and arranged them on the shelf; tacked up the photograph of Charlie's

Digitized by Google

mother over the writing-table; tried on a blue flannel shirt and a pair of baseball shoes, whistling an air from that last opera of Delibes's. I took a walk and tried to find the spring — came back without finding it; took down the photograph and put it up in another place; rearranged the books; swung a hammock, and cut my thumb. It was the longest day I ever spent in my life. Finally it occurred to me suddenly that something was liable to happen to Charlie. Wasn't there a milldam? Didn't I know that girls only thought of themselves? Good heavens, the Hotchkisses might be kidnappers. The air began to get blue, and I snatched a stick and set out hurriedly on a rescue — to meet Griselle and Charlie coming over the pasture-field, hand in hand, beautifully silhouetted against the sky, and Lilah wig-wagging behind — all of them consummately unconcerned, and Charlie crammed with new experiences, in which milldam was most conspicuous. Griselle passed him over in the most uneventful way and returned home.

Then Charlie and I got our supper. If I remember correctly, we had bologna sausage, cheese, crackers, and tea, and would have had sardines if I had known where that infernal can-opener was. It was about the time of day that I usually took steak à la Bordelaise, or a bird, with several entrées and a pint of dry wine. I admired my nerve as I ate the bologna, and wondered how long I could keep this up.

Digitized by Google

After supper I proposed that we sit outside our door and have a talk while I smoked my pipe. We could see the sun go down through the trees. The conversation was carried on, I must admit, mainly by Charlie. His imagination had been inflamed by the milldam. "It was only such a little ways off, too."

"If you go there alone, I'll skin you," I said.

"Oh, but it's full of big white flowers."

"They're rank poison — sure death to boys if they haven't got some one with them."

This was a fine parental beginning. I tried to steer the conversation into other channels. I had a story pat of a boy who got himself drowned by being alone and nobody to pull him out. I told it pathetically, and wound it up just as the sun dropped behind the hill. There was no response. I looked round. Charlie had gone down with the sun. He was asleep. I picked him up and carried him in. He was "dead beat," as we say.

"You're a nice companion," I growled, as he climbed into his shakedown, "to keep me company. What am I going to do with myself till twelve o'clock?"

"Good night, papa," he said with inimitable indifference.

To be left alone in this manner was hideous. The very stillness was asphyxiating to the ear. Nothing but a wailing whippoorwill cut into the hush of it. It seemed to me that she was frightened at the stillness. The moth finally put

Digitized by Google

my candle out. Then I went outside, and walked up and down like a sentry, and tried to picture to myself what the gay world was doing at that lively hour. Well — Tillotson was playing billiards at the University Club; Bannister would be eating a late dinner with the Farnsworth, and she would ask him between sips, "What do you suppose ever became of your friend?" and Bannister would whistle me down the wind lightly, saying, "Oh, his accounts were all right. He slipped off to Europe for his health." And that would dispose of me. But the Farnsworth's little mauve letter was lying in there on the table under the chintz curtain. Confound her! I had not opened it. Oh, I've got some sand — blast that whippoorwill! It must have been twelve o'clock when I concluded to try the bed, and it was certainly two o'clock in the morning before I went to sleep. And then up rose Griselle, with her muslin. She must have been hanging around the place all night, for I could swear that no sooner had I got my eyes closed than she began to clatter in the kitchen. She even went so far as to sing "The Sweet By and By." Just as I had the two pillows muffled round my ears, Charlie was pulling at my arm. "Papa, get up — get up. Griselle wants to get the breakfast."

I must have growled like the captain of a tug, but it was six o'clock, and it slowly dawned upon me that that young ruffian had been up an hour. I went out in the shed and reprimanded myself quietly. "How do you like it?" I said, as I

Digitized by Google

looked for the spring water. "You haven't got so much sand at this hour of the day, have you?" I don't think I answered myself. If I did I made no record of it, but I did try to explain to Griselle why I couldn't eat her broiled chicken and fresh eggs at that time in the morning. And she said, Oh, I'd come to it after I got rested.

"Rested? Do I look tired?"

"I guess you're tired on the wrong side," she said. "When you get tired on the right side, you'll eat like a Cheshire shoat."

This jarred a little, but it was prophecy. About half-past eleven I remarked to Charlie, "My kingdom for six small oysters on the half shell," and he said, "Let's go in and open the sardine-box."

And we did.

It was not an easy job that I had taken upon myself to reconstruct my life. I don't think I realized the innate difficulties of it until I had burned my bridges. It is all very well and quite natural for us to talk about nature and obedience and simple living if we are sportsmen, or naturalists, or even poets. But if one is a stock-broker, who has been communing with the money market for eight years, it comes pretty tough at first. Nothing but the grim alternative of sudden death could have made me so determined a bridge-burner. But I must acknowledge that during the first week of my voluntary exile in the far-away Hotchkiss woods I had to contemplate my eight-year-old son and heir with deadly concentration of

Digitized by Google

purpose in order to understand that sudden death was not altogether preferable to slow extinction in utter solitude.

The Doctor had used the lad as a sort of emotional lever, but I soon found out that the lad himself was as rigid in his views of life as the moral law. He never bent a single natural impulse to accommodate me. I was to bend all my case-hardened habits to accommodate him. He expected me to go to bed at eight o'clock and to get up at five. He had in his bones some kind of thermometrical arrangement with the sun. He insisted that a breakfast at seven o'clock was the proper thing, and he carried this obduracy so far that he serenely set up oatmeal and milk as a sufficient inducement. When I told him that we were going to play Robinson Crusoe in the woods for a year, he complacently accepted it with the immediate arrangement that I was to be the man Friday.

The fact is I never suspected how consummately I had drifted into an artificial and selfish disregard of the normal mean of things until I began to associate on intimate terms with my own offspring. After a week of it I appealed to the Doctor by mail. "What am I going to do to occupy my mind?"

"Don't occupy it," he wrote back. "What did you climb out of the cerebral maelstrom for? Stop thinking for a while. Play. Become an animal — and watch Charlie."

"Is thy servant then a dog?" I inquired.

Digitized by Google

"Yes," he replied, "or some other more ignoble animal. Perhaps Wall Street has inoculated you with the notion that you belong to the mineral or vegetable kingdom. It's a great shame. You are indubitably and necessarily half animal. Take my advice, stay in your kennel and wag your tail."

Once again I wrote him to say: "I think you have overestimated Charlie's abilities as a guide. He hasn't quite understood my case from the first."

Then I got this short and sharp rejoinder: "But I understand your case, believe me. There are some mountains in our early vistas, and the children get nearer their summits in their play than we ever get with our pack-mules."

If I had not had a profound respect for this gifted old curmudgeon's knowledge, and a sneaking fear that he and sudden death had an understanding, I think I should have slipped away in the most pusillanimous manner at the end of the first week. As it was, I girded my loins and stood up to the extraordinary job of lifting myself by my own waistband. But to be utterly frank, now that it is all over, the only thing I did was to hang on like grim death, and let Charlie do the rest.

I must have looked very idiotic sitting there trying to coax myself into the belief that I was enjoying an Arcadian existence and had got back to the primitive and joyous simplicity of life, which was a most preposterous conclusion; for if

Digitized by Google

I had reached that condition, I would have gone to sleep like Charlie, and not thought about it at all. But the man who has for years packed all his excitement, his society, and his indulgences into his nights is not going to wrap the drapery of his couch about him like a proper yokel at eight o'clock, and lie down to pleasant dreams. Night, as I knew her, was a luxurious Ethiope, who not only "wore so many jewels on her face you could not see 'twas black," but carried a good many dulcimers in her hand. The night that I had come into was undoubtedly the original institution, made to sleep in. I made up my mind that it was absolutely barren of anything else, and then a June bug hit me, biff, in the forehead, and fell over dead on the Doctor's letter, as if he had given up his life in the attempt to prove me a liar. All that I could see of the night was a square, velvety black space where the window was. It was fretted by some dim flying wings that microscopically glistened in the vagrant starlight, like tiny threads woven into the blackness. Out of this mystery of the dark crept all kinds of shadow sounds and occult breathings. I could hear the dog barks dying off in a vanishing perspective, but marking the dim distances and the solitude with their grading accents. Along the ground at regular intervals came the throb of a bass viol as some bullfrog twanged his string over at the milldam.

A man cannot fool with night when she is *in puris naturalibus*. It is only the wanton night

Digitized by Google

that he has himself made that will tolerate his impertinence. While I sat there thinking of financial combinations that had been cut short, and saying to myself, "The bulls are up in Berlin and the Bourse is bellowing," another June bug hit me on the nose and fell over on his back on the table. Several more came in, bombarded my lamp-stand, and fell dead. There was quite a row of them on the Doctor's letter with their claws up. Harmless, jolly little imps of the darkness, they seemed at that moment to be punctuating the night's contempt for me. They recalled to me a vanished estate when they and I were on better terms. All at once the name came back through the window like the bug himself — *Phyllopertha horticola*. It was as plain as some of the adages in my old copy-book, and along with it my juvenile translation — "leaf-eating, garden-haunting acrobat." Always he came with the early roses and the first hot, dry spell. And always without steering apparatus, he ran foul of everything, and always got the worst of it. Now, either he or I was an impertinence. Night with these winged *succubi* was tedious. I looked at Charlie. His head was on his arm. How far away he appeared to be. Nothing could annoy him, for the same night that was bombarding me had her protective arm around him. I made a memorandum on the margin of the Doctor's letter. "Get mosquito netting, and send for book on entomology." Then I blew the light out and went to bed.

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

[illegible] himself [illegible] [illegible]ence. While I sat [illegible] thinking of [illegible] combinations [illegible] cut short, [illegible] saying to myself, "The [illegible] in Ber[illegible] and the Bourse is below [illegible]" another J[illegible] [illegible] hit me on the nose and fell [illegible] on his [illegible] [illegible] the table. Several more ca[illegible] in, bounded [illegible] my [illegible], and fell dead. There was quite a [illegible] on the Doctor's [illegible] with [illegible] [illegible] Harmless, jolly [illegible] imps of [illegible] [illegible] seemed at that moment [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]'s [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] estate [illegible] [illegible]

[illegible] All [illegible]

[illegible] It w[illegible] old copy [illegible] [illegible] translation [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] I was [illegible] [illegible] His head was [illegible] [illegible] appeared to be. No[illegible] [illegible] night that was [illegible] [illegible] arm [illegible] [illegible] on the margin [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] Then I [illegible]



DOWN WINDING DUSTY ROADS AND OVER ANCIENT STONE FENCES.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

The next day I stumbled in my stupid way backwards into the new life. I took a tin pail and called to Charlie. "We must find that spring," I said, and we set out like two tramps through the jungle, starting a good many garrulous chipmunks and seeing the occasional flash of a rabbit. We reached a wooded crest toilsomely, and I heard the far-away toot of a locomotive whistle. The white clouds were sailing over the hazy hills in the east. Everything was slumberous and warm and restful. Somewhere in that direction there was social life. We would walk over there and discover it. So we stowed our pail away in a clump of bushes and set out on a long tramp of exploration — down winding dusty roads and over ancient stone fences, new vistas beguiling us on, and the yellow dog keeping ahead with a beckoning wag. Visions of a cool hamlet with the railroad running through it like an artery from a distant heart; a quaint little station with jolly old telegraph poles, and some nice old hostelry where we could get a homely dinner and hire a horse to bring us back like two companionable German students.

But the roads were elusive. They wound round with singular want of purpose, and wandered down to deserted mills or turned in at antique graveyards, and sometimes lost themselves in grass-grown clearings where I suspected there had once been camp-meetings. So, finally, when the sun was getting vertically hot and the dust was working its way into our marrow, we

Digitized by Google

sat down on a flat stone by the roadside, and Charlie mildly suggested that it was time to eat. As we sat there a farmer came by driving a heavy wagon leisurely. I hailed him, "Say, neighbour, how far is the town?"

"What town?"

"The nearest town."

"Do you mean Slocum?"

"Yes, anything."

"Well, you strike the Slocum pike about three miles over yander, and that'll fetch you to Slocum. It's about eighteen mile."

"How far is it back to the Hotchkiss woods?"

He turned square round in his seat, threw one leg over the other, and regarded us with a new interest.

"Be you the man that's livin' in the Hotchkiss woods?"

I felt instinctively that the whole county had heard of me. "I be," I said. "I've lost my way. I'll give you a dollar to haul us back. Maybe you could tell us where we could get a lunch."

That struck him as funny. "Lunch — hey? I s'pose you want yer dinner. Wal, it's an hour past dinner-time."

The impropriety of being hungry when the dinner hour was past had never struck me so forcibly before. Finally he "allowed" that we might get a hunk of bread and a dish of milk at the sawmill, but he wasn't going any farther. So we climbed in, and he jolted out of us what little resignation we had left, and landed us in a stable-

Digitized by Google

yard of the sawmill, where there was a strong and not unpleasant odour of hemlock sawdust, and where we were speedily the objects of benevolent suspicion to several persons who eyed us through the green blinds. Nevertheless, we were graciously provided with hunks of bread and flowing bowls of milk served in a summer kitchen by a young woman in freckles whom the angels called Pauline, and who kept her eye on the big seal-ring on my little finger, so that when she refused to let me pay for the food I gave her the ring, coming dangerously near calling her Pauline and telling her that my grandfather the Doge of Venice had married the Adriatic with it.

By this time the old teamster, who had been wrestling with himself in the woodshed, had obtained a victory over his conscience and concluded to take us back for the dollar. As the life was nearly jolted out of us by the time we reached the edge of the Hotchkiss woods, we told him we would walk the rest of the way, and then Charlie and I set out to find our water pail, coming after much wandering upon a little brook winding down through the valley among watercress and marsh-grasses with a pianissimo gurgle. We took off our shoes and stockings, and plunged our dust-covered feet into its cool pockets, and then set out to explore it, wading along its channel.

Presently we came to a grassy basin with sloping green banks — a natural saucer that must at some time have been brimming, but now was left green by the little stream that wound through

Digitized by Google

its centre. I imitated the yellow dog, and threw myself on the slope, but Charlie went to work promptly to dam up the outlet. I watched his futile hydraulics with lazy interest for a few moments, and then went and helped him with my superior knowledge. I rolled the stones up and piled them, while he stopped the interstices with sod. It was very jolly to see the water put on an air of timidity, and race round the basin as if a little frightened and looking for an escape. I tugged at heavier stones, digging them out of a neighbouring bank with my fingers and rolling them over with incredible toil. Both of us worked like slaves. There was something fascinating in the gracious conflict of the water. It was like romping with a handsome hoydenish girl, who as soon as you caught her eluded you with bursts of laughter and little gurgles to run off defiantly in a new direction. All at once every interest in the world suspended itself while that basin filled up. The element was so coy, so gently self-willed, and so flashingly and musically capricious, that the desire to subdue and tame and possess it stirred some instinctive masculine impulse even in Charlie. I had no time to think about it then, but I can see now that we were savage Angelos painting a mural picture. The little lake rose to us with fairy response. It brimmed the basin, took on frills and furbelows of ripples, flung out jubilates as it leaped over our embankment. It snatched sky depths from the air, and planted magical willowy islets with

Digitized by Google

miniature palms and ferns, and sailed argosies of leafy galleons round about — one of them had a luxuriant caterpillar curled up in its prow like a voluptuous Cleopatra.

It was not until the lengthening shadows warned us, that we set out for our cabin, and then went to work without any didacticism or other nonsense to get our dinner. I had sand under my fingernails and scratches on my wrists, but I remarked to Charlie, "Pot cheese and strawberries are awfully good, my boy," and he, with his mouth full, made voracious response, "Awfully, ain't they?"

About half-past eight o'clock he looked at me with sleepy surprise. "Are *you* going to bed, too?"

"Yes," I said, "I think I'm played out. Good-night."

"Good-night, papa."

I changed the memorandum on the Doctor's letter, to read — "Send for book on hydraulics." That's all I remember of that night.

Having imitated Charlie up to this point, there was no good reason why I should not get up in the morning when he did. But he was ahead of me, and cavorting at five o'clock with the yellow dog on the wet wire grass. I heard his invitation to come out and see the sun rise, a performance that I thought should have worn its novelty off several thousand years ago. But I took a look at it, and it had some special features that were almost Persian or Hellenic. His Majesty rose over a wooded hill, setting fire to the trees in a most

Digitized by Google

riotous manner, and to my disordered imagination presenting Aurora in *propria persona* coming down the hill with a long shadow in front of her and her chip hat burning like a crown of gold. Of course it was Griselle coming to get our breakfast, with a pail of fresh milk in her hand and Gabe Hotchkiss trudging on behind. Really this was not so bad, but the disturbance that the birds made as she came trippingly down the slope, struck me as being a little overdone and rather like the claque at a professional matinée.

Griselle utterly lacks the sense of proportion. I noticed at the breakfast table that Charlie had a new doily under his plate with a capital C worked in its centre. What does a child of his age care for such attentions? Griselle's talents lack adaptability. However, I told her, with much pride, of our hydraulics, and explained to her how hard we had worked to make a pool of water in which we could bathe.

She listened respectfully and only said that there was already a beautiful little pond only a few steps below that.

I felt crushed, but Charlie rose with the instinctive genius of his age to th situation.

"But we didn't make it," he said.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER III

THE KILLING OF MARMION

MY doctor having succeeded in exiling me and my eight-year-old heir to what he called "the recuperative wilderness," sent me occasionally a tart reminder of the wholesomeness and beauty of the process I was undergoing. He is a delightful megatherium of an extinct school, and his corrective bellowings, muffled by distance, afforded me much amusement in my solitude, and doubtless much edifying precept.

"Isolation," he wrote me, "is the balm of life, and it is better for the constitution than the spice of variety. If I had the power, I would provide unpadded cells for society and shove the gayest of its votaries into them regularly, and turn the key on them, merely to increase the average of human life. I am more and more convinced that the Frenchman was right who said that progress is a disease, and eventually society will die of civilization. It is fast losing the power

Digitized by Google

and the privilege of taking breath. The path to heaven is choked with late dinners, and we are forgetting the route." (The old pirate, I'll wager he was writing this in his dress-coat, while the coupé was waiting to take him to a banquet.) "I have tried my best to introduce a few of my gifted patients to their own economies, but they hadn't time to know themselves. They live in a magnetic bath, and would die of ennui if they did not feel the shock of things going by. They are converting themselves into mere conduits. You are the first fellow I have met who, coming suddenly on his own grave yawning before him, had the pluck to say, 'No, I thank you,' and walk off in another direction. Bully for you."

It was by such artful ticklings of my pride that the old ruffian got me to wear my chains with a sense of heroism. I begged for some news very much as a morphine patient begs for his drug. "News," he replied, "there is nothing new in the news. Everything seethes and roils and jostles and bursts just as it did when you were here. Men are running over each other ruthlessly, and dropping out of sight as usual. I don't know whether you remember Calhoun — he snapped his E string at concert pitch last week. He is pretty well forgotten by this time. He was so loaded with the events of the universe that his mind snapped. He was one of the modern idiots who try to play the rôle of Atlas with nothing but their sensibilities. Becky Moultrie you knew. I saw you at one of her receptions before she got

Digitized by Google

to be a woman of affairs. She sent for me last week; said she had a stitch in her side — would I drop in between twelve and one. Her lunch time was the only opportunity she could spare me. 'I haven't time to be sick,' she wrote me; 'I've got to preside at the meeting to-morrow, and my time is all laid out for next week.' It was three days before I called, for I had something more important than a stitch in the side to look after. But she was a woman of neatness and despatch. When I got there, she was laid out. It turned out to be a pleuratic stitch, and the flowers were coming in as I arrived. This universe of ours is constructed on the stop-over plan, and there is no use in kicking against it. This through-train business doesn't at all agree with the tropical swing of things, which provides cloisters and still nights for forgetting. By Jove, old fellow, there wouldn't have been any Renaissance if there hadn't been Dark Ages first, and there wouldn't have been any Pilgrim's Progress if somebody hadn't impounded Bunyan. I have never read it, but I understand it's a great work. Go to, every man can be his own Buddha, inasmuch as he has a Bo-tree in his soul — if he will only sit down under it at times and be mum and get acquainted with himself."

The only scent of the city in this philosophy was sceptic and mortuary, and there were times when I would have given a good deal for a sniff of an ailantus tree or a whiff of consommé. But all the same, the regimen of isolation was working

Digitized by Google

a quiet change in me. I was getting on better terms with myself without knowing it.

I recalled a curiously trivial experience I once had in the city similar to something narrated by a well-known Frenchman. I came home one night from a late and rather riotous supper to my room. There was a full-length mirror in it, and as I lit my gas I got a glimpse of myself, flushed and eager, and it gave me a strange start; why, I never could tell. But I regarded myself for a moment with startled awe. That ghost of identity, forgotten in the rush of impressions, had caught me alone, and I must have shuddered at myself. It was nothing more than what Burns means when he says, "Oh, wad some power the giftie gie us to see oursel's as others see us." But it was an analogue of that old superstition which turns the mirror to the wall when there is a death in the house, for no one knows what uncanny recognitions may flit over its surface. There is always a lurking suspicion that some wraith will pass and taunt us. If you make the inquiry, you will find that no belle looks in her glass when she comes home from the revelry. The confounded thing betrays her. It reflects.

How to get on comfortable terms with yourself when you are alone. This is where the Doctor's "Charlie philosophy," as I called it, came in. "The best way to contemplate yourself," he wrote me, "both medicinally and morally, is through parentage. If a man would see himself through a crystal lens, let him become

Digitized by Google

the father of a boy. This is the answer to that vain prayer of experience — Oh, that I could live my life over again. You are living it over again. Watch it. While you have been throwing life away like a heap of faggots, it has been budding. It is given to every father of a boy to be his own incubus or his own good angel. If you will only listen to your primitive self, you will hear a Memnonian voice as of Nature herself. It is saying, 'It is better to have one woman who believes you are the greatest man in the world, and who presents you with a boy who agrees with her, than it is to be the greatest man in the world.' Under all the flashing tumult and flying spume of a masterful life are the unsullied depths of a creative love with a Kyrie Eleison in it. These sub-depths never get stirred by the life you have been leading. You must sit a while on the shore of this sea you have crossed, and see the shallop of yourself sporting on the beached margent, and feel how helpless you are to load your experience into it without swamping it. By and by, as its sails get stronger, it will venture out to try it all over again. No charts or compasses of yours will still the voices of the sirens, and no silken sails that you can furnish will turn him from the magical horizon. 'The isles are floating on a furlong still before.' Sit still a while and wait on the sands. Some day he will sail wearily back, looking for the love that he never found elsewhere, to find when he returns, mayhap, only the runes and the desolate

Digitized by Google

water-marks. Now is your time, old fellow. Take yourself by the hand, let yourself climb up on your knees and enfold you in protective innocence and reproach you with warm kisses. There is a millennial touch in it, believe me, for you will have gotten rid of your carnivorous egotism and will lie down with the lamb. A touch of prophecy, too, if you will but remember. For is it not written that 'a little child shall lead them'?"

Literally to renew one's youth, according to the Doctor's prescription, turned out to be a series of gracious surprises. With Charlie's hand in mine, I walked into some mysteries that gladly turned into revelations. We took up with some toys in our imaginations, and let the real fairies into our experiences, so that little curtains were lifted all round us on worlds unrealized.

One hot day we lay flat on our stomachs under the shade of a beech, among the June grass and the daisies, peering down into a magic spectacle, and yet it was the planet's history in petto. The great loom of the universe was working there with miniature continents. It was a paleontological glimpse of the pre-world, as if Nature kept ceaseless memoranda in shorthand of all her monstrous cycles of change. There were the equatorial forests and the prehistoric monsters. All one had to do was to get the inverse scale adapted, and the gigantic fronds waved their plumes, and strangling creepers wound in tangles, and strange forms of life wandered through. Green leviathans

Digitized by Google

crouched in corners; scurrying termites ran hither and thither. A slow-moving angleworm drew his ophidian length along the ancient geologic reaches, and an armoured pterodactyl, in the shape of a dragon-fly, came in flaming gorgeousness like Apollyon, and picked up an inhabitant or two. Here was the oldest Nibelungen Lied going on still, with real dragons amid the real elements in this demiurgic workshop. Somehow I fancy that Wagner, when he heard the eternal melodies, must have been lying on his stomach and looking at the eternal animate forces.

But what is the use of trying to get these child-like experiences over into literature? One must be a Thoreau to do it. When I interrogated the mysteries like Hamlet, there was Charlie with his round implicit face, and he seemed to say to me, "You want to know the secret of Nature; well, you will have to become an obedient part of it, then you will know, but you will lose the power and the desire to tell it." That boy never makes any demonstration over a sunrise, and he looks at me wonderingly when I begin to cavort and effuse. He seems to be more familiar with the processes than I am. They are spectacles and episodes to me. Heavens, it is always sunrise with him; why make such a fuss over it? And that is always the way with souls that live close to Nature. They take it as a matter of course because they are a part of it, and that is where Cooper made such a mistake with his Natty Bumppo, who was always going about attitudinizing and philosophizing

Digitized by Google

about that which such a man would unconsciously appropriate. Even Poe, with all his genius, failed to lie on his stomach and look into the grasses of the field. His Raven and his Annabel Lee are not arrayed like one of these. Fancy him writing the "Flower de Luce" of Longfellow, or the "Chambered Nautilus" of Holmes, or the "Water Fowl" of Bryant. If he had been guided by the implicit faith of the boy, he would have taken the advice of the guide in Dante's "Inferno" when he came to some of the horrors, "Look and pass on."

Besides all other experiences there was one that I cannot help making some mention of. It was purely psychic and confidential. I found that Charlie was more or less of a telephone into eternity. Do not misunderstand me. In the breaks of our existence all of us come at some time to that tower in the valley of desolation where faith has run a wire out into the shoreless leagues. In all the ages man has come there and sent his messages out and waited for answers. But none ever came. His cry was for "the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still." He must have missed the right instrument. I only know that the sound of the voice came plainly back to me at times; that I often felt the touch of the vanished hand, and something out of eternity looked through the near-by windows of another soul. I have listened to it in playtime. The inflections, the ineffable something was unmistakable, so that the voice was

Digitized by Google

not utterly still. At such times I was in danger of getting sentimental, but Griselle would come like a vestal and fill the whole woods with the incense of fried ham, and Charlie and I, like two devotees, would walk up to her altar and perform our duties with carnivorous disregard of all sentiments. So does Nature, when she has her way, preserve and equalize her antagonisms and convert even fried ham into ambrosia.

I think we grew quite like Brahmins under our mango trees. The entire population of the woods, having come to the conclusion that we were either too effeminate or too orthodox to kill anything, took advantage of our helplessness. The squirrels came in at the window in the morning. The woodchucks sat on their haunches on our wire grass. The rabbits made burrows under our hearthstone. We could hear them scolding their broods at night and bumping their heads against the flooring. The wood-turtles crawled in over our sill, and the young ones dropped out of Charlie's pockets at night when he hung his trousers over a chair. As for the birds, they reminded me of the gamin in Frankfort Street. They gathered in front of our door in the mornings and waited to be fed, and there was never a night that a bat or two did not manage to worm himself into our confidence when we were trying to sleep. It was very amusing to see the complacent contempt with which Lilah, the yellow dog, and Gabe Hotchkiss regarded this extraordinary tolerance. But I think there was a quiet

Digitized by Google

understanding growing up between these two and Charlie that it was high time the killing began. One morning I surprised the infant in the woodshed watching Gabe at work on a hickory limb. I was informed that the preparation was for bosen-narrers. My lamb had passed the stone age. "What on earth do you want with a bow and arrows?" I asked.

"Want to kill birds," he said triumphantly.

And there was the old Adam beginning to peep out in my Arcadia.

The Brahminical growth was very curious, and I now see that it was a part of the general obedience to which I had subjected myself. No sooner had I condescended to strip off my aggressive individuality for a while, and put myself implicitly into the general order, and drift with the ordained arrangement, than the general order came inquiringly up to my threshold and held out paws and beaks and mandibles, and wagged tails as if it carried in its poor, half-developed consciousness a kindly desire to renew the paradisaical truce. It is astonishing how quickly the gossip of the woods carries. The birds told the squirrels and the squirrels told the woodchucks: "That man and his boy in the Hotchkiss hut are not killers. It is incredible, but true, they haven't destroyed anything since they arrived."

This rumour appeared to have excited the curiosity of every bug and beast and creeping thing within half a mile of us. There was one adventurous chipmunk which, having heard these fly-

Digitized by Google

ing yarns in the bush, resolved to find out for himself, and being of a reckless disposition, he sat on our window-ledge one morning, and pushed his impertinence over the table, where there were some peanuts that Charlie had left scattered about. We stood still and watched him, and he sat up and tasted the new order of nut with a trembling kind of bravado, carrying one of them away with him to corroborate his story, knowing very well that he would be called a liar if there was a crow about. He must have made up a most interesting account, for the next morning several of them came and kept at a safe distance in the trees to watch him go through the performance that he had evidently boasted of. He was such a pretty picture of tiny electrical energy, and so incapable of interfering in any way with our lax duties, that I could not find it in my heart to frighten him. That fellow became quite familiar and visited us regularly, and when the window was barred with mosquito netting he went round and came in through the kitchen door, always being rewarded with a few peanuts. Having at some time called him a "jack o' lantern," with reference to his marvellous swiftness of motion, Charlie shortened it into "Jack," and by that name he was known in the family as long as we stayed in the hut. Late in the fall he had the impudence to come with a companion and make a nest in a corner of the woodshed, much to the annoyance of Gabe Hotchkiss, who ranked him as "vermin," and to the standing amazement of the yellow dog, that could

Digitized by Google

never quite get it into her head that it was not an infringement of her proprietary right in Charlie.

That this squirrel somehow spread the news that we were a pair of incomprehensible and effeminate duffers who lived on peanuts, without sufficient masculinity to interfere with anything, and that the whole animal creation ought to take advantage of it, I have not the slightest doubt, for it was not long before a woodchuck came in the morning and sat up like a kangaroo on our wire grass, and tried to guy us, casting occasional mild and inquiring glances at our open door. I remembered enough of my natural history to know that this was the American marmot, set down in the vulgar vernacular as the "ground-hog," and loaded by the American farmer with a number of amiable superstitions. But I never knew what a handsome and harmless animal he is till I consented to live in the same dimension of space for a while with him. He would sit there in his marsupial way, and wash his face and comb out his whiskers, seeming to say all the while, "I understand that you're not on the shoot." By degrees Charlie coaxed him up to the door-step, telling me to keep out of sight, and when the early summer apples came he would roll out a ripe one to him, and we would watch him with amusement sit up and sample it. So this fellow had to be included in the happy family, and we called him "Marmion," merely on account of the sound, I suppose.

It was Marmion that made me a Brahmin, or at

Digitized by Google

least brought me to the full consciousness that I was a Brahmin. He attached himself to us with such a confiding gentleness, and sat round with such a helpless and appealing dependency, that we admitted him to the *entourage* quite as a matter of course. Then, too, I was put to it by Charlie to draw on all my rusty stock of natural history to explain hibernation and rake up the old myths of the Farmers' Almanac about the marmot's weather prognostications, especially his immemorial habit of coming out in the spring to look for his shadow; and I discovered how deeply interested, beyond all else, boys are in animals, most of them preferring the menagerie to the circus before they are sophisticated, and all of them caring more for a dog than for the Decalogue.

In thinking the matter over, I arrived at the conclusion that it was on account of Charlie that the beasts of the field became so familiar. I framed a comfortable theory that there was a millennial link between childhood and the whole animal kingdom. No sooner had this fancy taken firm root than it began to throw out another, which was that childhood, thus extending a hand downward to the dumb up-looking origins of life, might extend another upward toward the serene Beyond to which all life was tending. It was in this way that our isolation and sweet companionship stirred some unsuspected and medicinal forces in my own tired heart, as if a harassed and strained man could climb back into the cradle of life and hear the original lullaby.

Digitized by Google

One Sunday morning Griselle had insisted on taking Charlie to church. She had come over in extra muslins, looking very crisp and blossomy. Together we had polished up the boy, and then they had gone away hand in hand, very happy, without even looking back or giving me a thought. Charlie's last instruction to me was, "Don't forget to give that apple on the table to Marmion when he comes in, and give him the other one when he comes back." This led to the explanation from Charlie that the animal always carried the first apple away, and ate the second one contentedly on the lawn, because he had young ones somewhere. I rolled the two apples out on the wire grass, took my stick, went off for a solitary walk, and, coming to an inviting cloister on the edge of the wood, I sat down under a cedar canopy to take some deep breaths of Sunday solitude and to ask myself what inscrutable bar there was to my going to church with Griselle. The tinkling bell of the distant chapel added a faint melancholy rhythm to the air as it mingled with the low inarticulate psalm that went up from the earth, "making a cathedral of immensity for the everlasting worship without words." Everything was at rest and breathing a Te Deum.

Suddenly there broke in upon it all the discordant sound of men's voices, harsh and jarring, accompanied by eager dog barks — that blend of screams and yaps that indicates intense animal excitement, and I started off to find out what was the matter. It was not long before I came up

Digitized by Google

with a group of stalwart young men with their coats off, working like mad at a stone wall to get at something hiding therein. They had with incredible labour and inexplicable enthusiasm and noise pulled down about six feet of it, cemented and wire-wound as it was with age and blackberry vines, their three dogs dancing about in half-delirious expectation. So intent were they all on their hunt that they gave no sort of heed to me, and, believing them to be after a venomous reptile, I watched them with curiosity, some kind of brute elation in me responding to the noise and conflict of it. At last, when a burrow had been uncovered, and the biggest dog of the three thrust his nose in, what was my astonishment to see him pull out an animal and throw him with a vicious jerk into the centre of the group, and there sat Marmion on his haunches, to be greeted by a chorus of relentless exultation as he looked at dogs and men, trying, in one momentary glance of wonder, before he was torn to pieces, to comprehend the inexplicable injustice and cruelty of it. I shall always remember the reproach of that look. Such intelligence as the poor animal had was wrought in a moment to a pitiful interrogation. "Why should four men and three dogs beset with demoniac delight such a harmless creature as I am?" Something of the same futile astonishment beset me. There was no use trying to rescue Marmion. He was torn to pieces before I could make myself heard. But why it should afford such satisfaction to the

Digitized by Google

men, and why four such lusty examples of manhood should be so devoid of a sense of magnanimity, I could not for the life of me understand.

I did not understand then, nor have I understood since, what it is impels intelligent immortal souls to this purposeless and cruel frenzy. I came slowly back, and when Charlie arrived and saw the two apples lying on the grass, he asked me if Marmion had not come that morning. I only said, "No; he did not come."

There are some things you do not tell a child. I suppose it is because you do not want him to be ashamed of his species too early in life.



Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google



GABE HOTCHKISS SPLIT MY WOOD AND BROUGHT THE SUPPLIES.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER IV

HAYING TIME

THE two human beings who had come to my assistance in my exile were admirably adapted to carry out the Doctor's regime. As I have already said, Gabe Hotchkiss split my wood and brought the supplies up from the village twice a week in his farm-wagon, and his niece Griselle came dancing o'er the flowery lea every morning like Aurora to cook my eggs and bacon. They both regarded my domestication with a small boy in that hut with respectful wonder, and I often saw them with their heads together comparing some fresh discovery and trying to get a new light on my mystery. I was evidently beyond their mental processes. I was undoubtedly a gentleman, and might be a millionnaire doing penance, but there was no reason why a gentleman might not be a crank, or perhaps a counterfeiter. In any case, I was legitimate prey for the rustic appetite. They treated me with a discreet obeisance that no familiarity on my part

Digitized by Google

could break through. There the mental processes stopped, and the obeisance ran on uneventfully without them. I managed to let them know by devious explanations that I was an invalid doing a quiet outing with my boy for the sake of his and my health. It was very interesting to see Griselle's feminine solicitude peep out at times, as if she were wondering when I would have a spell, and she could get hot cloths ready and stew down some burdock, and Gabe could enliven matters by rattling that farm-wagon three or four miles for the country doctor and his bottle of quinine.

Griselle was a human butter-pat, sweet and fresh from the rural churn, with the family stamp on her face, and ready for the market. She had not as yet been put on the dairy-shelf, where, as you know, all butter-pats begin to absorb whatever is nearest and strongest.

And then she took to Charlie so ingenuously and easily that I conceived an entirely new order of respect for this rustic handmaiden who, when she was not flitting, was standing on an inaccessible pedestal of youth to which my maturity looked up with admiration, but without ever being able to exactly make out whether it was a fancy of Watteau's or a realistic part of the commonplace life that I had come into. She was always turning toward me an inquiring face of mingled girlhood and womanhood that I had never anywhere encountered.

The demoiselles of my late life were all delicious

Digitized by Google

and anxious antagonists whose prerogative it was to aggravate, and baffle, and outwit. They always kept one trying to make out what was beneath their decorative exteriors. Woman to me had been for several years a predetermined hallucination from which man was always in danger of being freed by marrying it. Her most delightful piquancy was a little apprehension that she would at some time be caught and found out, and I fell into the easy cynicism of my set, believing it was pleasantest to be deceived and even saying that if love began with understanding, it would begin where it ought to end — and that would be very much like an acorn beginning by being an oak. But then it is so different with a butter-pat! You are liable to melt all its lineaments unless you keep it cool. Of course the masculine nature never sees a butter-pat fresh and inviting, but it has an irresistible dairy impulse to mould it anew and generally makes a mess of it. But when a man reaches the age of forty-four, perhaps butter is not so apt to melt in his mouth.

There was a fine paternal dignity on my part for several weeks with this handmaiden. I instructed her about Charlie and other duties with a proper sense of the chasm that was to yawn between us, and over which she invariably skipped without the slightest recognition of it. In other words, the butter-pat went on in its dairy way, and I was the thing that was melted.

Now I think of it, it was the absence of shock that was doing all the work without my knowing

Digitized by Google

it. The benignity of a graciously enforced loafing period never dawned on me until I began to pick up some of its surprises. My first discovery was that I could look myself in the face without being frightened. There's nothing so very dreadful about you when you're left to your own resources, I said. Then I began to discover the sanitation of uneventfulness. This life was a sort of homœopathic application of death itself as a prophylactic of death, just as sleep is. To lie still for a while on this great breast of the universe and hear the mother breathe is suspensive but restorative.

I found myself at various sly times trying to find out if Griselle was pretty, and I was generally baffled by the equally sly suspicion that she knew what I was up to. Her first appearance on the scene had been in the centre of an enormous armful of lilacs, carelessly plucked as she crossed the field from the old Hotchkiss "Folly," and ever after she was associated in my mind with the spring odour of lilacs. She wore her rustic airs with the same superiority that a Niobe would give to her tears. She floated in and out of that homely little domicile not unlike an ordinary butterfly, always appearing to be a great deal more gossamer and ethereal than she really was, and creating the strange fantasy that it was her special duty in life to keep up that odour of lilacs. This girl element of the exile was very insidious. It had the soft, whelming quality of a summer cloud, that we have the best authority for saying never excites our special wonder.

Digitized by Google

I acknowledge that the vacuum of such a life was something dreadful at first. It was like some of those gifted convicts who are compelled to come down from transcontinental railroad-wrecking or bank-looting to making shoes. But even the convict, when his sentence is determined, must adapt himself to his stripes. All the time that I was growling and groaning a change was taking place. One day, at the end of three weeks, I suddenly discovered that I had forgotten to lie awake at night. I had been sleeping for a fortnight like the rude forefathers of the hamlet and hadn't noticed it. The next discovery was that ham allays hunger as well as broiled sweetbreads, and strawberries gain a relish by picking them yourself. That discovery led me to assist Griselle in shelling peas and peeling the potatoes. As a volunteer I had to lie a little. I told her that I had learned all about it when camping out — as if one ever had peas when camping out, or ever peeled his potatoes. But what did she know about it? She only held up my parings afterward, and remarked that potatoes must have been plentiful when I camped out.

The absolute unstrungness of shelling peas was new to me. I should not hesitate now, as an expert, to say to any master mind wearied with the problem of existence — try shelling peas. To be relieved from the duty of circumventing Smith and killing Brown, and saving your scalp from Jones, and saying smart things to madame, and being continually on the lookout that somebody

Digitized by Google

does not hit you in the back of the neck unawares, gives a certain voluptuous spontaneity to idleness. No dress-coat to put on in the evening; no hypocritical letters to be answered; no flowers to be bought; no new restaurant in some dirty street to be put up with; no tiresome hostess to listen to; no weary sense of being on parade. Freedom to go barefooted if I felt like it, and eat with my knife if the impulse took me. Safe from that demoniac cry of "Ah there"; never startled by a "Halloo." All the social bandages gone, and with them most of the lies that they engender.

One day I walked over with Griselle to see the Hotchkiss "Folly" — a great tumble-down mansion, whose projector had ruined himself, and was now out of sight and out of mind somewhere under his old apple trees. What he had laid out as a prospective park had reverted, in the inevitable course of Nature, to a bedraggled farm. The other practical Hotckisses had foreclosed, and the latest Hotchkiss, crawling out like a spider from some web where he was biding his time, had taken possession, and was now making it pay the taxes and keep him. An atmosphere of vanished hopes mingled with its wild spilth. Great big colonial rooms, weedy porches, rotted and twisted by wistaria that had screwed itself into all the chinks and made them gap. A grandmother in one end of it, close to the summer kitchen, and the big oven that had been closed up for years, but had smoke stains still around its mouth, telling how it had once flamed and roared. The

Digitized by Google

well stood close to the door with a gourd for a dipper, and some tall grasses leaned over the curb to look at themselves in the cool mirror. Griselle conducted me from room to room as an ancient guide might do. She opened an old parlor, threw back the shutters, letting in a yellow gleam on the surprised matting. She even played "I Would Not Live Always" on the old melodeon, after lifting off several boxes of seed and a bunch of laurel that had evidently lain there since last Christmas. It was very magical. The antique squeak of that old bellows swept me back to other days. How could she know that there was any irony in her song, and that I would not have been there if it had not been for my unreasonable desire to live always? The tender, asthmatic pulse of the instrument made me feel like a Hawthorne, and my emotions bulged as if with "Mosses from an Old Manse."

On another occasion I arrived there in haying time. Do you know what a dry spell in the woods means in early July? It is at that fecund hour that Nature comes into the full flush of life. Her atoms seem to break into animate existence, and you stand in a vortex of flying dust that takes on the first stir of vitality. The days are heavy with the weight of creation, and the tide of life croons in your ears as you sit and fan yourself helplessly. The hours are parched, and vegetation languishes with its burden of insects. But it was haying time, and Gabe Hotchkiss gave me to understand that all the affairs connected

Digitized by Google

with man's destiny were suspended until the hay was in. He had no time to go to the village, and my letters had to wait. When he explained to me that he had twenty acres of timothy standing and couldn't get any help to "throw it down," I asked him in a moment of reckless bravado why he did not hire me to help him. "What do you pay anyway?"

"Dollern half a day. Did *you* ever cut grass?"

I thought a moment. I could not remember that I ever did. In fact, I could not remember that I had ever cut anything but a few coupons and some disagreeable friends, neither of which operations requires a machine. I told him I thought that any smart man could manage to get through a day of it on a pinch, now that it had been reduced to mechanism.

"You might work the raker," he said doubtfully. "That would save Griselle. She wants to do up her cherries."

I can safely and graciously write about haying time now from my far outlook. These things get some kind of aura from the distance (you can put that quotation about the loan of enchantment to the view in here, if you know who said it—I don't). I'm afraid that the felicities of agriculture are like those problem plays we read about, and acquire beauty according to the square of the distance. Perhaps my heroism was very much like that of the bridge-jumper, but I really thought at the time that the feat of manual labour and the earning of a "dollern a half" would ele-

Digitized by Google

vate me in my own estimation, and possibly in the estimation of the practical young woman who came over to get our breakfasts. Every man of sedentary elegance likes to kick through his polite shackles at times, and show that his arms are not utterly devoid of pith, and that he is not such a "goldarned galoot" as the sententious judgment of the yeoman declares him to be.

At all events, I learned some things which possibly gave my after-thoughts a gentler and less selfish colour when I got back among my fellows. First, I found out that there isn't any delicious odour of new-mown hay in the haying operation, or at least, if there is, you do not notice it. There are too many other things to attend to. In the second place, the Arcadian delights of it are only apparent to the on-lookers, and, if there is any satisfaction to the workers themselves, it depends a great deal on whether hay is worth twelve dollars a ton, and who owns it. There are no iced drinks between swathes. There is no shady side to it, and in haying time the thermometer usually stands among the 90's. But I must acknowledge that Gabe Hotchkiss never heard of a man being sunstruck in a hayfield, and Gabe's going on sixty-two, coming next apple time, and doesn't lie for a cent. Such ideas as I may have possessed prior to this experience were vaguely ideal and Watteauish. Haying time, to me, was a sort of rural festival, with village maidens in short dresses and ribbons and high heel shoes, the heels generally painted red,

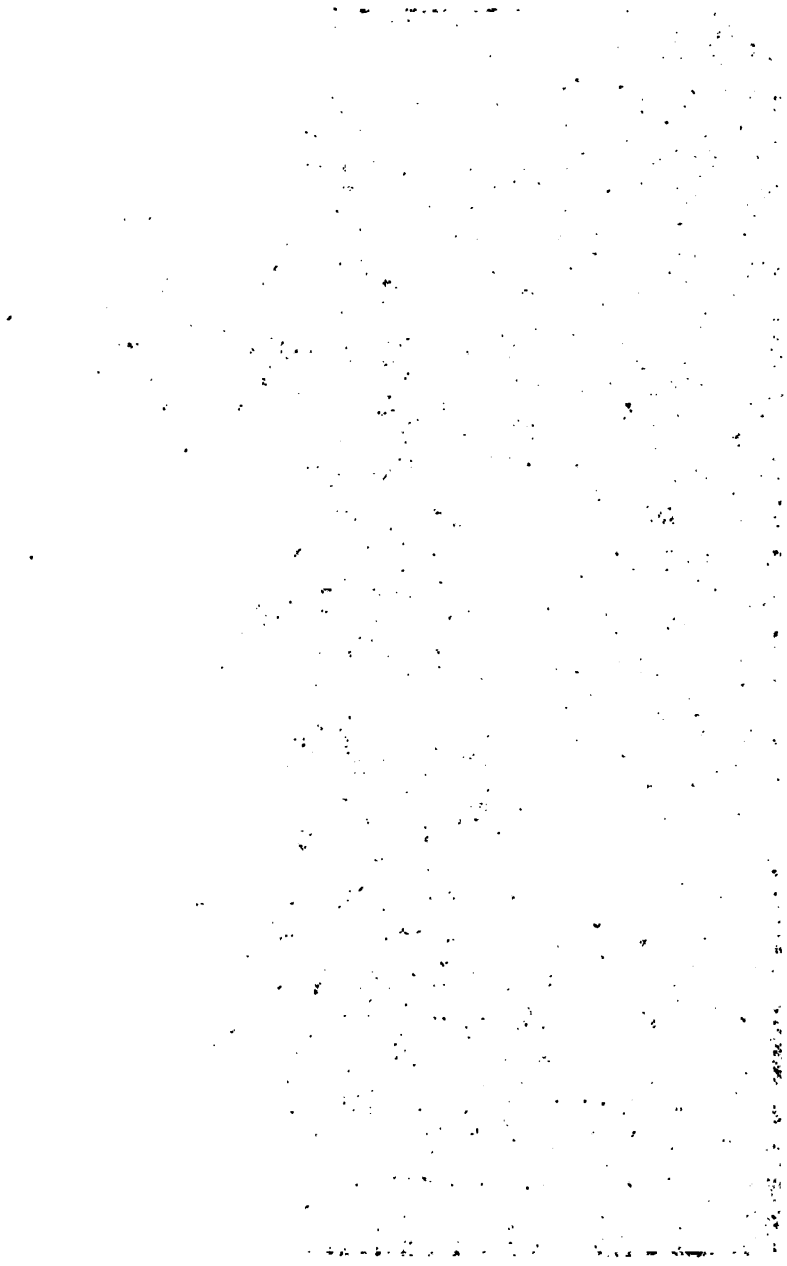
Digitized by Google

clustered in pretty tableaux, like Dryads on the top of a heavily loaded wain, with their rakes on their shoulders. I think if you had asked me at any time in Wall Street what was the special feature of haying, I would have answered, "Why, the nooning, of course, under the hedge tree, where the lusty farmers drink their switchel out of a jug, and 'chomp' their home-made bread and home-cured ham in voracious innocence, while the kindly animals look on with idyllic composure."

That such a picture is not in strict accordance with the facts, I have now to state very solemnly. Beside a twenty acres' hay-field of ripe timothy, the Staked Plains have many advantages to the luxuriant observer. But I am bound in honesty to declare, from actual experience, that the work in such a field has certain subtle compensations. It does not drain the vital economy of a man like a fifteen minutes' walk on lower Broadway in the middle of the day. In fact, I have known stalwart girls in New York who exhausted more fibre in one evening doing nothing, than they possibly could have lost had they driven that raker all day and earned their porridge with the sweat of their marble brows.

One other thing I learned, and it was that in a hay-field all conformities and considerations of rules of life vanish. The one thing to do is to get the hay in before it gets wet. Dinner-hour, breathing-time, and all the amenities of life are suspended till the job is done. No one is think-

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



GABE HAD TWO TEAMS IN THE FIELD, FOR HIS TIMOTHY WAS VERY DRY.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ing of how he looks, or what the criticism will be, or what impression he is making on the observer. He is simply taking the straight line between two points, and the points are the field and the barn.

Gabe had two teams in the field so that he could cut and rake simultaneously, for his timothy was very dry, and he did not intend to get more of it "thrown" than he could manage, and I noticed that he kept his eye on the west as though he expected a shower. About two o'clock I began to pray for it. My back ached, and my hands were blistered. But Griselle had come into the field with her chip hat, bringing a distinctly Watteau flavour at last, and I was not going to give way under her eye. She looked at me with wonder, I thought, and presently had a pitch-fork in her hand. By and by, when a bank of dun clouds began to roll up in the west, I rejoiced in my heart. It really looked like an atmospheric rescue. We had cut about four acres, and now it would be a race to get it in. I distinctly remember that some kind of noble enthusiasm was caught from Gabe, in this conflict with Nature, of an entirely different quality from that zest with which one enters into a conflict with his fellow-man. I forgot all about my hands and my back in my sympathic anxiety to see Gabe beat that rain-storm, and I felt like giving a shout as the last forkful went up into his hay-loft and a peal of congratulatory thunder broke over us that startled the horses.

How it did rain! It pounded. The water

Digitized by Google

came down in sheets mixed with hail. Little rivers broke loose all around. The gutters spouted and the roof reverberated. Everything seemed to hold its mouth wide open, and Gabe stood there in the corner of the barn enjoying the almost savage copiousness of it. A Biblical line came into my mind — Biblical phrases always do pop up to exactly fit an emotion. "The wild asses drink their fill." I never before appreciated the strength of that line. There we were, men and horses, huddled in the barn, actually bombarded with refreshment. But presently it cleared up. A great fresco of sunset flamed in the west, and we all climbed into the wagon and were rattled back to the "Folly" under wet trees, every one of which tried to imitate the shower in its own way and shook its drops down on us as we passed. But we were very jolly as we jolted. The consciousness of a victorious accomplishment made us boisterously kin; and when we got to the house, Griselle had a magnificent supper awaiting us of hot slapjacks and cold pork and beans and fried chicken, a banquet entirely unfit for gods, it was so bounteously human. Afterward Gabe jolted Charlie and me to our hut and dumped us on the wire grass pretty well fagged. When we were alone we sat and looked at each other rather foolishly, and Charlie remarked, "I thought you said we came up here to play."

"Yes, we did, Comrade," I replied, feeling after an appropriate didacticism, "but a little hard

Digitized by Google

work now and then is relished by the wisest men. I wished to set you a good example, my boy. Look at my hands."

But you cannot deceive a boy with that kind of hypocrisy. He looked at me straight, and said, "Say, Dad, you're sleepy, ain't you?"

The blessed vacuity of being tired on the right side was a novelty, and it was fraught with a dull kind of satisfaction that at last I had arrived at that condition in which, like the yellow dog, I could drop down at a moment's notice and forget obediently. When you are physically tired, you take a header into sleep with a recklessness that is juvenile, and the moment you let go everything, Nature sets to work to fix things up thoroughly and noiselessly, so that when you wake up the next morning there isn't anything to remember. You cannot do this when you are mentally tired. The mind runs on with its artificial momentum in spite of sleep. I could not even hear the clack of that reaper, and how often the tick of the telegraph had danced through my head the livelong night.

And this is the whole lesson — that recuperation means getting away from yourself. I remember reading in Montaigne long ago that a man may travel the world over like a fugitive without escaping from himself. Now I found out that a man cannot do an honest day's work at haying without leaving a good deal of himself behind.

It occurs to me now that it happened to be cherry year that July, and cherry year does not

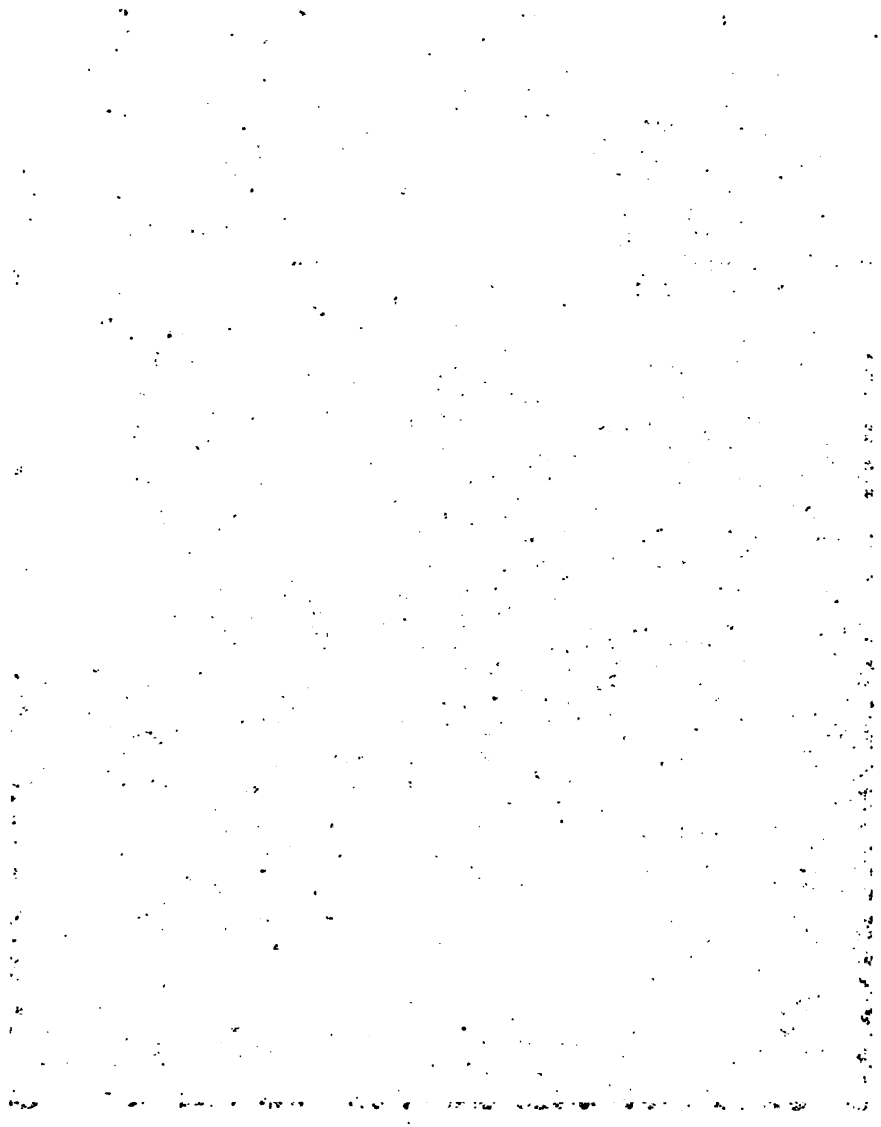
Digitized by Google

come every twelvemonth. Cherry year occurs about once in a decade. Then this fruit asserts itself along the roadside with reckless prodigality. Then the old trees remember the opulence of other days, and the children climb up into them and rejoice. All the neighbours mark time with enormous cherry puddings and "slump." Have you ever been present at "slump"? No? What a lot you have missed. There is a rotund and reckless profusion to "slump" when it is turned out of the pot upon a big dish and comes on steaming like a mountain of ambrosia that would captivate your soul, narrowed as it is by petty courses and relays of side dishes. Then it is that the women stand over the hot stove and gossip about the price of sugar, and try in vain to screw the lids off their glass jars.

But after all, it is a shame to cook the jolly, carnal cherry. He should be eaten alive, for he is a gentle, meaty reminder of our primal carnivorous days, and we fondly call him an oxheart, as if with a fleshly remembrance.



Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

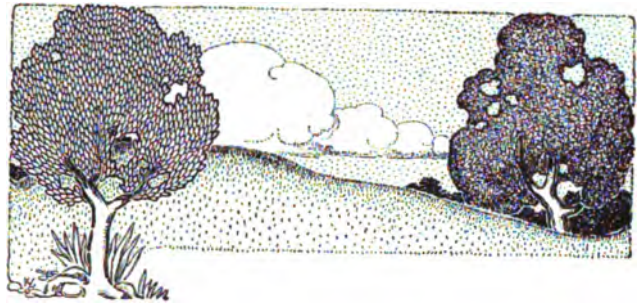
Digitized by Google



THE BASIN WAS NOT FULL ENOUGH TO RUN OVER THE LIP OF THE DAM, BUT THE WATER FORCED ITS WAY THROUGH MANY CHINKS SPORTIVELY, IN COOL JETS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER V

DUMB INTIMACIES

ABOUT five minutes' walk from our cabin was the Cluny Milldam, a very ragged and weedy barrier across a little river, which it had broadened into about an acre of sweet water ten feet deep at the spillway, and shallowing off to a thin pond at the upper end that died out into a bit of wet meadow. The banks for the greater part of the way were green and lush, and willows and dogwood screened them nicely. Such little artificial lakes are common enough all over our country. They are never kept in repair, but are suffered to grow rank and picturesque and always have an old mill, long deserted, at one end of the dam. From time immemorial they have been the treasured trysting-places of the boys. To this pond Charlie and I came on the hot evenings and struck up an entirely new friendship with the water. The basin was not full enough to run over the lip of the dam, but

Digitized by Google

the water forced its way through many chinks sportively, in cool jets, and ran glistening down the old logs and beams into a pretty sandy pool below, where it boiled and raced in solitude, and then went singing down the valley through the marsh grasses. On those torrid nights we came stealthily with the yellow dog through the jungle, let ourselves down the bank, and, after denuding, sprawled and splashed in the pool until the shadows wrapped us in their soft garments, and the stars came out and laughed at us.

There was undoubtedly some kind of unsuspected magic in the place, now that I think of it. The old dam was like an orchestra of oboes and flutes, to which the little raceway added a chorus of its own, and somehow the element itself had the air and the ingenuousness of youth not yet grown lusty and rank and boisterous. All we had to do was to accept its limpid invitation, and it covered us with cool kisses in which there was a breath of mint and calamus. To catch water in its pudicity, before it has grown salacious and turbulent and put on the hoary airs of the ocean, is a rare delight. It is like establishing an understanding with a dog or going down into the nursery to rest your soul with a bit of "who's got the button?" If you have only known water at the seashore, in its acrid puissance, when it is like a trade union and glories in its whelming multitudinousness, you can have no idea of its tender intimacies when you catch it in the nursery of its career.

Digitized by Google

Such acquaintance as we struck up with the sweet water was really a private and confidential understanding. We did not insult it with any social functions or have any other critics on the bank than the muskrats and mud-turtles that looked at us through the branches. We stripped ourselves down to an instant comradeship. Everywhere else in the world we should have put on precautionary "duds," which seems to me now very much like putting on a mask when you are about to say your prayers. No one knows how abominable it is to be rolled up in wet rags except those fellows who have walked *in puris naturalibus* into some of the private grottoes of Nature where there is no immodesty and no fear. How the flesh exults when it feels the contact of the element. How astonishingly white one looks against the dusks and shadows. What a new sense of benignity to lie down in the pellucid drift and measure its going by the caresses it flings on its way. What douche was comparable to those cascades that went down our backs as we sat under that old dam? Those persons who use water only to wash themselves with degrade it, and it generally becomes a very serious servant to them. To Charlie and me it had no duty to perform but to frolic, and we heard it calling to us in soft tones long before we reached the dam.

This new relationship of man to Things was what I meant when I said it was a kind of natural faith, but it is Brahminical rather than Christian.

Digitized by Google

Browning wrote volumes to express it, and when he got through, he had simply said: "All's well in the world." But that is saying a great deal, isn't it? I am reminded just here that the late Dr. James Martineau, after writing two monumental volumes of splendid metaphysics to establish the reasonableness and the beauty of the Nature of Things, put down this remarkable acknowledgment in his preface: "I am now aware of the tediousness of these metaphysical tribunals, especially when the whole process wins at last, through all its dizzying circuits, only the very position which common sense had assumed at first."

For the sensitive city man or woman, it would be hard to find a more forbidding place than a dark pool at night, shut in by thickets. He or she brings to it some such fantastic horror as Poe has furnished. It is a "ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir," just as soon as the sun leaves it. It swarms with obscene things and dangerous. Its water pockets are pitfalls, and in its recesses lurk enemies that writhe if you touch them. But all this disappears on acquaintance. Man for the most part breeds these monsters in himself. It is true such a place is haunted by all manner of strange forms, but a man finds out sooner or later that one and all of them are held to a *noblesse oblige* that they never violate. Some kind of statute ordains that they shall quietly and politely give way to man, and even the tenacious snapping-turtle that comes up from the mud of

Digitized by Google

the pond observes us with a Chinese decorum, and sits stolidly by or goes his way. We learned by insensible degrees that nothing interfered with us so long as we were amicably inclined. Even that exceptionally mischievous imp, Sir Stomoxys Calcitrans, the incisive horse-fly, that later in the season will bite through a dress-coat or Parisian stays, goes to roost at sundown, and as for the mosquitoes which every milldam spawns, I learned soon enough that we could never coax them out of their coverts into a current of air.

Perhaps you think that these things are not worth learning, and are quite beneath the notice of a Wall Street man. As for that, they are not worth spending time and thought upon if you have something better to do, but the beauty of it is they do not exact any time or thought. They merely accompany you as you frolic. They are like the water. You must not make their acquaintance with a reporter's inquisitiveness, but like a fellow craftsman who receives the pass-word and keeps it to himself.

I recall my experience lying on my back on a deep pool of those waters, looking up at the stars —and then looking down at them, until I seemed to be suspended in the limitless ether and could feel the soft tide of the great spaces. Then Grétry's words came to my mind: "God shuts off this world once every twenty-four hours so that we can see the universes." It was impossible to have these experiences without feeling that the dull strifes of man's existence slunk back-

Digitized by Google

ward a little, and that one had touched upon some kind of deep-lying assurance, for it is at such moments of implicit abandonment that one can hear the soft swing of the planets themselves. Often when Charlie and I came home through the cool woods, I would look at him and then, like Dr. Martineau, feel that the course of my dizzying speculations brought me out where the boy started.

I may as well say that my conviction as a casual observer of Nature — and, alas, I have been too busy to be anything more — my conviction is that you must seek her confidences when she is not in one of her exhibition moods. Like woman herself, she is only communicative when her passions and pageants are over, and then it is that she will put her cool hand in yours and let you see her gray spirits and white lisping through her bare ruined choirs. Then it is she speaks in sibylline undertones. She is a little hushed by the stars. The conventional man only knows her in her exhibition spells. He remembers her full-dress sunsets and her decorative autumns. He revels in her blazonry of sunshine, but he never dared enter her cloisters and catch her in dishabille.

I think the medicinal touch of the sweet waters often remained with us in our dreams. We could hear the Mother crooning while we slept, and that cool lullaby was very apt to have a minty breath. But better than all was the sense of immunity that was built into me, and that is,

Digitized by Google

I think, a very curious and a very precious thing. We come into life bugaboo-haunted. Our infantile souls reverberate the fears of our ancestors and shudder at the dark. But always there is at the bottom of our consciousness an unexercised mastership of soul that breaks loose often in dreams and carries us defiantly against our environment. We walk in fiery furnaces and are not consumed. We wander on fields of eternal ice and are not cold; we lie down with the kine in the chilly spring rains and feel them not; we float in the ether without propulsion. To be able in the slightest degree to approximate these experiences in our waking hours; to look serenely on the grinding wheels of creation without a throb; to know that all the grades of existence beneath us have been our playground, and are coming up our way, makes the ghost stories disappear one by one. That Nature rightly viewed and obediently wooed has this intimation of immortality and immunity in her was Wordsworth's creed. Nature, when listened to rightly, always seems to me to be saying exactly what my old tutor used to say to me: "But why be so impatient? You have an eternity before you and an eternity behind you."

I put it down as the best outcome of my small philosophy, gained in a long vacation, that it is a good education for a man to stop wrestling with Thoughts and get acquainted with Things. Of course, we cannot all be philosophers or even savants. We must go back into the thick of the

Digitized by Google

fight. But it is a very good plan at times to stop overcoming and obey; to lie down and listen. That there are sermons in stones and tongues in trees, we have the best of authority for believing, but the Shaksperian sense of it is not the recuperative and obedient sense, for Shakspere imputed a great deal to Things with the authority of a poet, and, like Orlando, tacked himself up on the trunks to their infinite embellishment. To me it is the absence of books in running brooks that delights. One gets past somebody's impression of the thing to the thing itself, and, after all, that is a fraternal realism that is not to be explicated. Whatever the secret of the thing is, it is yours when you cease to question it.

How often since, in the fever and disappointments of life, when ingratitude or envy or insincerity hurt me, I have thought of that old Cluny Milldam, and pictured myself once more lying on my back between the illimitable depths above and below, that were glittering with stars, and Charlie somewhere near, adding his childish voice to the waters. I suppose we are all prodigals at our best, only it is hardly correct to say that we are returning to the Mother, for we never quite got away from her. But I think that most of us who look backward over our winding paths, at all the palaces we built and deserted, will find that they had no such outlooks as the open doors and ample windows of the cabins and rude blossomy bowers we erected during our first pilgrimage; and I fancy that many a man who is tired of his

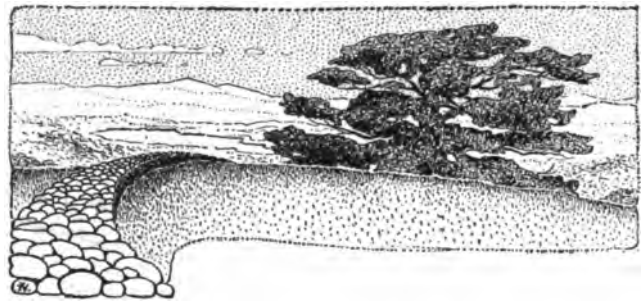
Digitized by Google

Alhambra lingers with an immortal childishness over his vagabondage, even when, as Eleanor Sweetman puts it: —

> "Sorrow has built a palace in his soul
> With windows opening on eternity."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER VI

A SUMMER'S PIPPIN

GABE HOTCHKISS was a forehanded veteran who had developed along "the cool sequestered vale of life" until it was hard to distinguish him from the materials he had worked with. He wore the aspect of a sinewy old trunk, gray and gnarled, whose roots in the ground have outspread the branches in the air. I was afraid his thrift was earthy. I could not quite make out if that stoop in his shoulders was humility or gravitation. His hair grew bushy and gray all over his head and down his jaws to a sort of mossy stalactite on his chin (I was getting bald at forty-four). He never was sick a day in his life after he teethed, barring three days that he was laid up that year of the Chicago fire by Squire Losee's bull that hooked him under the rib and threw him over a stone fence. He had risen and set as regularly as the sun for sixty-five years, and there was no physical intimation

Digitized by Google

that he would not continue to rise and set for sixty-five more. He was as punctual as the gas-collector, or the seventeen-year locust, and he could cut and pile a cord of wood without stopping to take heed or take breath, and then walk to town for his supplies when he wanted to save his horses. Is this the standard that Nature sets up for us in her ideal man?

Gabe had fibre, but no temperament. There was a stolid independence in his unassertive air that was quietly masterful. He had put away a thousand dollars a year for ten years "outen his hay," and Heaven only knows what he had before that. Panics might come, banks might break. He would read of them in his weekly family paper, and smile with the air of a man who has got past most earthly contingencies. The old tortoise, he made me feel like the agile hare in the fabulous race. His lack of temperament and his static health aggravated me unreasonably. A man ought to decay obediently as well as develop obediently. There is something repulsive in an old man who preserves nothing but his physical vigour. It is not even an animal, only a vegetable virtue, and reminds one of the hair that grows through the chinks of a coffin after a man is dead. The Doctor has amiably corroborated me, and says that a man ought to begin to die gracefully at fifty. He can prolong the job as long as possible, but he should not neglect it. By giving up the ghost gradually he will avoid a disagreeable convulsive fight and not be called to give it up all at once.

Digitized by Google

I do not know that excessive health destroys temperament, but Gabe had not as much as a tree. A tree is at least sensitive and transmutes carbon and silex into something a little more sympathetic than gas and atoms. There was a young poplar visible from the door of our hut that had many indications of juvenile vivacity and responsive delicacy. I have watched it dancing and whispering in delight and turning up the white palms of its myriad leaves when there was not air enough to move the flame with which I was lighting my corn-cob pipe, and all the oaks and chestnuts stood wrapped in petrified disdain, utterly unaware that anything was passing.

While I am writing this there comes back to me like a fruity odour, the remembrance of an apple tree that stood overshadowing the back porch of my father's house. It was a gnarled and stunted affair, but oh, what summer apples it bore when it was in the mood. And that's the point — it had its moods, that no almanac or horticulturist could get the hang of. I have never tasted such apples since — little red-streaked affairs that burst into wine at the very sight of your teeth, and bent the boughs low down with their largesse. When the family of us grew up and went our ways, we often wrote home from different points of the compass for a basket of the July apples, but although the "old man" rolled them up in paper and packed them in cool corn leaves, they always perished before we got them, for they captivated with their odour every

Digitized by Google

insect they met on their journey, and he bored through all wrappages to get at them. Those apples had to be eaten the moment they were plucked. They resented anything like delay. They were so evanescent that when the mater put a dishful of them on the hall table, it was for the fleeting odour, and she warned us children not to touch them because they were spoiling.

That tree stood awkwardly in the roadway and was more or less of an obstruction. It was scarred by the hubs of passing vehicles, but "the old man" could never find it in his heart to cut it down. It was the most wayward, capricious fruit tree I ever saw. It had spells when it pouted in unblossomy poverty. But there were other spells when the fulness and the overflow of Nature laid hold of it. Then, like a beautiful wanton, it made love to the children, the birds, and the bees alike. No sooner had the robins arrived than it began to array itself like a bride in odorous tulle and became one great cloud of blossoms. It banked the road up with a kind of fairy snow and kept the brooms flying on the porch with a teasing mischievousness. All the birds came and flirted with it, even the wrens forgetting their gamin habits and accepting it as a communal music-stand. Thus it bore witness to us in our thoughtless youth of the fleeting character of all exquisite things. I never could quite divest myself of the fancy that John Burroughs and Thoreau had at some time sat under that tree and munched, for did I not long afterward detect

Digitized by Google

in their sentences something of the same juicy aroma of that elfin fruit?

But to return to Gabe, I found in him a grateful mental relaxation. His animal equanimity had a soothing effect like the liberty of empty rooms after a rout. You felt that he was not one of those fellows who have a stock of words on hand and are continually looking for an opportunity to which they can fit them. His mind, or whatever it was that occupied the place of that *esse*, always took the straight line between a thing and a word. He would no more be original or smart than he would be liberal or imaginative. His companionship was therefore a kind of mental water-cure. I could sit and watch him saw wood for an hour, and our conversation would, as Henry James somewhere put it, "be ruffled delightfully by the passing airs of the unsaid." I remarked to him while thus employed, "This will be a bad season for potatoes, Gabe." He stopped a moment, expectorated, and then came at it as the crow flies, "Gosh to hemlock, that's so," and then the wood-sawing went on.

I noticed that irony and repartee took on, in Gabe's presence, a curious analogy to water on a duck's back, and you cannot imagine how depleting and soothing all this is to get where everything is trite and simple, and has been said a thousand times before, and is none the less valuable on that account. It has occurred to me that as heaven is always regarded as a place of rest, perhaps it may be a place where everybody gives

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



I COULD SIT AND WATCH HIM SAW WOOD FOR AN HOUR.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

over trying to be "smart." Isn't there some kind of intimation of this in the communications that are said to come from the other side?

But there was Gabe's niece, such a graceful sapling coming up from the roots of this old stump. Very pretty the girl was, with health and vigour and a lot of fine qualities that were looking out of her face and wondering what they were made for. As the weeks rolled on, I grew to admire her very loyally, as a well-disciplined masculine sense should, and I felt also very grateful to her. It was really as if some one had come every day and hung a Fortuny in our hut, just for fun, as the children say. Her unconscious animal grace, so wholly independent of any artificial aid, was not unlike a simple melody. These unsophisticated, long-limbed Hebes of the field have a priority of command which we never question, and I think it oftenest expresses itself in motion. Griselle swished about in the little kitchen, making grace audible, and to the acute ear it had a finer *nuance* than that purely textile swish that is purchasable in society by the yard. I noticed her running on the wire grass, and she had an unsuspected regnant swagger that is in the bones, not in the mind. She did not walk — she bounded. Her animal economy exulted and gave her head a fine toss. She seemed to be making billows of emotion and crossing them without ever knowing it. One morning she came over and caught me unawares, bellowing a matinée hymn out of sheer thankful exuberance, because

Digitized by Google

I was alive. I must have blushed a little, and said apologetically and religiously, "I was praising God while I was at my best."

"That's easy," she replied, "you can't help it. It's a good deal more of a job to praise Him at your worst," and then she blushed as if she had unwittingly come down to my level of saying things and swished off to the kitchen, actually going through that narrow door, I thought, as if it were a circus hoop.

I find a "mem." in my note-book which must have been made about that time. It reads like this, "When one finds a woman as God made her and not as man refashioned her, is she not apt to be a handmaiden?"

I believe some vague chivalrous notion crept into my mind of rescuing her. There was no programme about it. I only said to myself, it is a great shame to have those infinite possibilities grow up gnarled and sinewy. It makes one feel like putting on armour and hunting round for a lance, to see them peeping out of castle windows into a world unrealized.

Charlie did not take my view of Griselle. A child naturally lacks æsthetic appreciation. In a moment of confidence I ventured to remark to him that I was glad he admired the young woman, for I considered her a very estimable person, and he informed me that he had constructed a rather contemptuous opinion of her. In the first place she couldn't climb a tree, and then she did not see any fun in making mud

Digitized by Google

dams, and utterly failed to understand the yellow dog's best qualities. Altogether, it was considerable of a problem with him what girls were made for anyway, and you can readily understand that it was too esoteric a job for me to tell him.

It must have been about this time that the following note was written down in my log-book in the woods: —

"Last night a pretty little black messenger flew out of the night into the room. He was vociferously urgent and woke me up. As I lay on my back in the dim light, trying to make out if he were a bat of reality or an incubus of sleep, he clung to the mosquito-nettings, head down, and twittered ominously and plaintively, and made frightened excursions about the room, knocking the breath out of his body against the wall, always to come back to my canopy with an alarum. What his message was I could not make out, but I tried to reason with him, one leg on the wakeful shore, and one on the dreamful sea. I told him that even things from the Night's Plutonian Shore need not be so noisy and hysterical, and if he had delivered his message, he could go away again and leave me to sleep on it. There was the open window, with two or three late stars low down, looking in; why not go out like a reasonable herald before I got the broom?

"But the fact is, mysterious messengers from the shoreless darks are about the stupidest of winged omens. As soon as I understood that

Digitized by Google

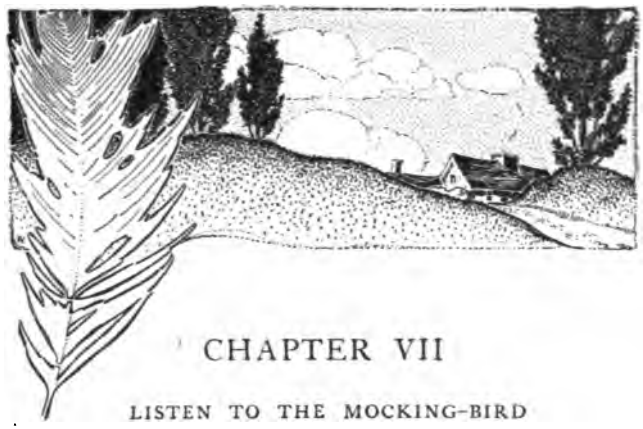
the stranger had flapped in at the open window where the netting was torn and was making all this disturbance because he did not know enough to flap out again, I got up and tried to assist him. He fought me bill and claw and knocked down the photograph that was tacked over the table. Getting tired of it, I went back to bed. When I woke up in the morning, there he sat on the sill against the lower half of the closed sash, rather weak and dishevelled from overexertion, and looking reproachfully at me as if I had been the cause of it all; whereupon I made up my mind it was a female bird, and having caught it, I brought it to the open sash to let it sail away, for which act of mercy it nipped me viciously in the thumb."

As I was looking after it, I saw Griselle coming over the hill like — well, like a stave of Milton's L'Allegro reciting itself.

But when Charlie got up, the first thing he said was, "Why, somebody's knocked down mother's picture."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER VII

LISTEN TO THE MOCKING-BIRD

ABOUT the 1st of August the delicate ear, no less than the clear sight, can detect the wane of summer. It is no use trying to comfort yourself with the calendar, there is a still small voice in the atmosphere. There will be sultry days and close nights and volleying showers, but, in spite of all, there is a growing restfulness, as if the zest of it were over and the lusty hours had grown mature. The first intimation will come from the cricket that ticks the transitions of the heyday in the grass, and presently the preliminary creak of the cicada will remind you that the coming six weeks lead up to the frost.

August, in spite of all her furbelows, loses some of the romp of June and July. She is like a young matron whose beauty is shadowed with the coming sheaves. The corn stands tasselled in dark green platoons. When the wind throws up the long blades, they are like the gonfalons of

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



I WAS LYING IN THE GRASS, ATTENDING STRICTLY TO MY REGIMEN OF REST.

Digitized by Google

the coming fall. If you rub the tassels in your palms, they will hint to you of Bourbon and leave a delicate flavour of sea-coal fires with jolly fellows taking off their furs to make a night of it. The showers will die off in slanting rains. How different from the thunderous gallopades of July, with July's quick-firing guns and riotous transformations of golden sunshine and dissolute sunsets of roses and wine. The drop of the summer apples has already a melancholy thud, like the fall of a curtain, and the south winds are querulous at the slightest provocation, and wheeze if there is a cranny or a rusty weathercock. If you look closely, you will see some premonitory yellow leaves already on the maples. The sumach is beginning to bleed, and the sides of the tomatoes toward the sun gleam through the rank vines with the late fires of the garden already kindled.

I was lying in the grass, attending strictly to my regimen of rest and listening to the little hurdygurdy of the cricket, when I heard on the still air the far-away throb of a brass band. I put my ear down close. There was no mistaking it — I felt the rhythmical beat of the drum and caught the attenuated blare of the cornet. They were playing "Listen to the Mocking-bird." I wondered that that old stuffed melody could hop out of its glass case and travel down the still air so many miles in that lively style. There was a wandering circus at Spelldown, and the band was playing the people into a matinée.

I was like a Prohibitionist who is eating mince

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



I WAS LYING IN THE GRASS, ATTENDING STRICTLY TO MY REGIMEN OF REST.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

pie with brandy in it. I felt the pristine stir in me and could smell the tan-bark ring. I was rather proud of this childish impulse. I coaxed myself to believe that I could hear the dear old clown with the whitened face say, "Here we are again," and wake the elemental soul with that old Eleusinian mystery, "What makes more noise than a pig under a gate?" This is coming back to the very porridge of our first lunch of humour. To know just how good brandy is in mince pie, one must be a Prohibitionist. I suppose the zest of anything depends on the deprivation, if not on the prohibition. I remember that a great traveller once said to me, that the much-vaunted cataract of the Ganges was a poverty-struck puddle, but that in a country where there was no water, a puddle looked like an inundation.

"'Listen to the Mocking-bird,'" I said to myself, as I leaned up against a tree and braced myself to watch the clouds roll by, a task which I have reduced to perfection. These sweetish runagate tunes come waltzing down our recollections, heavy with the dew of idle associations. Could there anywhere be such a fresh innocent sensation as to take Charlie and Griselle to the circus and fill my unselfish nature up with their delight! "Gosh to hemlock," I exclaimed, with my new provincial ardour, "it is engendered. Griselle will come out with an extra crisp muslin and a new ribbon, and, maybe, put on her high-heeled shoes, and rub bergamot in that furzy hair of hers. All the yokels of Spelldown will wonder who I am in

Digitized by Google

a negligée shirt and baseball shoes; and every time Griselle laughs and claps her hands I will smell the spring lilacs again."

Now, this was going back to first principles. Talk about renewing one's youth, — it would be renewing one's infancy. It isn't often that a man of forty gets the opportunity to play at Paul and Virginia and have the robins come and cover him up so that he will not recognize his own sentimentalism. To be a real, honest, rural swain for a while and have a maid hang innocently on your arm — gosh to hemlock — what would there be left for the pellucid emotions but to buy an accordion and learn to play "I Would Not Live Always" and "Listen to the Mocking-bird" on it? These pipings of Arcady come to a man when his turtle-dove is a mocking-bird, and he has acquired the art of leaning up against a tree properly, and watching the season go by, instead of the afternoon belles under the club window. Charlie and I might even try to crawl under the canvas if the pristine impulse did not give out; at all events, we could eat gingerbread on the same plane of enjoyment.

Presently Charlie and Griselle made their appearance. "Did you hear the circus band?" I asked. "The show stays over to-morrow."

"And we ought to take Griselle," exclaimed the instinctive Charlie, beginning to clap his hands and jump up and down in a kind of St. Vitus's dance.

"We?" I inquired, with a mock parental

Digitized by Google

gravity, trying to veil my own exuberance. "We, Comrade?"

"Yes," said Comrade, "but we can't. She's going on a picnic, and I've got to go with her."

I intimated that picnics could wait — circuses never did.

But it seems that the picnics of Spelldown are arranged with consummate tact to offset the circus. There are two churches in the town — the Methodist and the Dutch Reformed. They wait till the advance agent of the show bills the town and the cross-roads, then they sound their clarion call to the two Sunday-schools to get ready to take to the woods. The Methodists huddle the children all out on one day and give them ice-cream enough to lay them up for the next day, and then the Dutch Reformed drive out the other battalion. In consequence of this ingenious arrangement, it is doubtful if any of the well-bred children of Spelldown ever listened to the mocking-bird.

"So you have invited Charlie to your picnic?"

"I thought," replied Griselle, evasively, "that he would like to go with all the other children."

"I dare say."

"But he said he would have to speak to you about it."

"What he meant was that it would be a good idea to invite me too. But don't you think it would be pleasanter if you accepted my invitation, and we all went to the circus?"

She declined promptly. There were reasons

Digitized by Google

that she kept out of her words, but they got into that little toss of her head, and she looked quite Florentine as she stood in the doorway with her dress lifted ready for flight. Sometimes I thought Rossetti could have written her. He never could have painted her, she wouldn't stand still long enough.

Evidently circuses did not lure her, and she had promised the Rev. Mr. Hanks or Janks or somebody to take care of a contingent of "young ones" and keep them away from the circus.

Come to think it all over, she was right, and I told her so. A clean-minded little fellow like Charlie, starting out to avoid my pitfalls, would be better off with her at a picnic, eating some of the jelly-cake that everybody was sure to bring, than at the circus, getting his clothes all stained with pink lemonade.

"Perhaps," suggested Griselle, "you'd be better off yourself." I acknowledged to her that I had a real curiosity to see a country picnic. I could not for the life of me understand the *raison d'être* of it. Why men and women who lived in the country all the year round and were pretty well saturated with it should suddenly take it into their heads to enjoy it by the card, was beyond me. It really looked to me as though Farmer Jones, when he wanted to express his mad exuberance, went over and ate his dinner on Farmer Smith's field. I could understand folk in the city going slumming and getting up vivisection clubs, and when thoroughly *blasé* taking nitrous oxide

Digitized by Google

gas and having their teeth out. These things are at least departures, but to eat the same jelly-cake and hard-boiled eggs in a different field seems to me to lack what the critics call *motif*. Of course nobody can tell till he tries it just how superior as a moral discipline a picnic is to a circus; and a country picnic, I said, is about the only thing I haven't tried.

She looked at me, I thought, with just a flicker of commiseration, as if a man who had tried everything could hardly be worth so much curiosity as she felt.

I answered her look. "Perhaps it isn't quite as bad as that. But I have had a foolish desire to see all there is in life, and like the man in the play, I looked into Vesuvius and there's nothing in it."

"Not even ashes?"

"Well, yes — some ashes, but nothing else. It leaves an aching sense of goneness. You see, we city folk fall into the habit of regarding life as a side-show, and if it doesn't keep up the pace, we get dissatisfied."

"It must be dreadfully tiresome."

"Oh, everybody does his best to get just as tired as he can. Do you know, I thought I'd come up here for a change, where nothing goes by but the seasons, and they seem to kiss their hands to you and say they will come again. There is no such promise in the side-show. The same spring bonnets never come back. The same play-bill is never seen twice. Nobody

Digitized by Google

says *au revoir*. It's hurrah, boys, and good-by. Now you have the same picnic every year, do you not, and the same jelly-cake?"

Griselle had a delicious, spontaneous laugh. I know a soubrette who would give a hundred dollars a link for it.

"Some day," I said, "I should like to have Gabe bring you to the city when I am there, and I'll show you the kind of picnics we have. I'll take you to Coney Island. You never were in the city, were you?"

"Oh, yes. When I was studying music, Cousin Ed Yerkes took me with his sister to hear the music in 'The Old Homestead.'"

"Music in 'The Old Homestead'?" I said inquiringly. "What music?"

"Why, they sung 'The Old Oaken Bucket' in it beautifully."

"So they did, so they did," I said pathetically, and stopped to wonder how a girl could leave the real oaken bucket at her door, and go a hundred miles to enjoy a property bucket. Still, this knowledge made me feel that she was human like myself. "How you would enjoy the wooden milch cow and the painted dairy-maid from Mulberry Street at Coney Island, after you had milked your real cows."

Like all my kind, I felt a protective and proprietary interest in such innocence. I suppose Griselle intended that I should. The upshot of it was that Charlie and I toddled to her picnic, and I was her willing slave for one day. In try-

Digitized by Google

ing to recall some of its bright specialties, I find that my recollection of it is much like the recollection of an orchestral performance, and you know that if the performance is a good one, you do not remember anything in particular. No one tries to make a diagram of a warm glow. Only a general sense of wagon-loads of farm babies in white, and boisterous lads and lassies with base-ball bats and croquet mallets, all exulting in out-doors as if they had never seen it before. It was very pleasant to see young life decant itself in this simple manner, making the fields effervesce and the thickets bubble. But in the recollection of it is a pervading gleam of Griselle in her leg-horn hat, keeping up a quiet authoritative bustle like the Lady of the Manor, directing, giving me whispered orders that were imperative, but very demure, making me fetch water, climb trees to fasten ropes up for swings, everybody else regarding me, I thought, with a slight awe. It gave me a great deal of quiet satisfaction to take my orders, especially when they were confidential, and tacitly to concede her right to direct me, though how she got the right, or when it was conferred, I'm blessed if I know.

Altogether I entered into the spirit of the thing with a zest that surprised me, and when the sun was setting, we all bundled into our wagons and went off homeward, making the highway ring with our homely songs.

But that night when Charlie and I were in bed, I asked him how he had enjoyed himself.

Digitized by Google

"I think, Dad," he said, "that we would have had a good deal more fun if we had gone to the circus and left Griselle out of it. She's too smart."

"Do you think so, Comrade?"

"Yes. She told me to go and play — that she'd take care of you."

"Hark," I said, "there's the band. The show is over. They are playing 'Listen to the Mocking-bird.'"



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER VIII

THE CONVALESCENCE OF A CRACKED HEART

I HAVE tried to tell how I was frightened into my vacation by a physical warning, and by the Doctor who took it up and added to it. He called it the disease of civilization, and said the trouble was that it worked unseen at the centre, so that you never suspected its ravages until you collapsed suddenly. He held out a single plank of rescue, and I ran over it with amazing alacrity into the wild woods where I could escape from civilization for a year. Fortunately for me, my Doctor was a rational man, one of those rare doctors who do not weigh life in an apothecary's scales, or insist that you can cut every domain of it with a knife. He told me that my E string was a little weak (the Doctor plays the violin, or did in his younger days), and was screwed up too tight. "Of course," he said, "it is going to snap unless you let the rest of the instrument down to a lower key. In a word, you must get out of the orchestra."

Digitized by Google

If there is anything that an apparently robust man of large appetites and energetic brain particularly dislikes, it is to snap. I suppose that he can contemplate fading away and dwindling out with complacency, but there is something disreputable in falling down dead at a moment of supreme exultation or of conceded triumph. One does not enjoy the prospect of being found dead in his bed, or being carried out of the opera feet first by the ushers, in one's dress-coat, with the boutonnière on one's breast looking so superfluous, and the wide-open eye so helpless. Man is here like a sick animal — he prefers to keep some unobserved place and take time to adjust his dying with some sense of relevancy.

But what can a man do when the bell sounds? Somewhere, suddenly, like a vivid flash, comes the summons out of a clear sky: "Here you are, now — presto, are you ready?" He isn't ready, of course. I have read of men who were ready, but as a business man I never saw one who was. To get this dire summons in the middle, perhaps, of a smart remark, one-half of which must die out on blue lips, and know beforehand that admiration is to be petrified into pity, hurts a man's pride. It is curious, but we prefer death as a torturing jailer rather than as a highwayman with a club, who leaps at us out of unsuspected coverts. I am free to acknowledge that when I got my premonitory summons I took to my heels like a panic-stricken horse. Then, during the months of retirement, of which I have tried to tell, there

Digitized by Google

came gusts of Gargantuan laughter from my lusty doctor. It was like June thunder, full of bellowing promise. But he graduated his medicinal mirth just as the season graduates its thunders. In June he muttered far down on the horizon. In July he pealed from the zenith. In August he exploded, for by that time he found that, weak as my heart might be, I had will-power enough to follow his directions to the letter. I had wiped out the world for the time being and come down to mush and milk and first principles. I knew very well that he did not believe that I was capable of it. I had heard him say more than once that there was no escape for a man who drugged himself with society.

One morning I received a letter from him, saying he was coming up to take a week's loafing in my cabin and examine my tongue. I jumped with a glad apprehension and considerable solicitude. That old Lucullus coming here for a week. What would I do with him in this poverty-struck hut? Where would I put his silk shirts and pajamas? How pamper his capacious stomach? How fill his enormous capacity for comradeship? It was all very well for Charlie and me, who were roughing it for our health, and could sleep on a board and eat cold pork between sea-biscuit, and wash ourselves in the brook, but visitors — and a visitor who was an epicure, a connoisseur, and a social lion! Oh, I'd telegraph him and stop it, but before I could get a telegram down to Spelldown he arrived. I

Digitized by Google

heard his vibrations on the road above the rattle of Gabe's wagon before I saw him. "We're in for it, Charlie," I cried. "Put away the jack-knives" (we had been making some chip yachts for a race at the milldam); "we've got to entertain company."

When the portly form of the Doctor reached our door, and he sprang lightly enough out of Gabe's wagon, dressed in a loose outing-shirt, duck trousers, and hob-nailed shoes, his broad, handsome face beaming with good-nature, I forgave him; and when he lifted Charlie up in the air, held him at arm's length, and looked at his tanned and freckled face and sparkling eyes with unmistakable admiration, I cried: —

"Nothing the matter with him, Doctor."

He came at me with both hands, hit me a good fraternal whack in the breast with his fist, and shouted: "How's that cracked heart of yours?"

"Doctor," I said deprecatingly, "I can't accommodate you in this dugout. Heavens, you do not want to sleep on a shakedown and eat army rations. Better let Gabe drive you over to the 'Folly.'"

"No, I thank you," he said. "I slept on the ground and ate army rations before you had your second teeth; besides, when I have a patient that I am interested in, I never stop to consider what floor he is on. Take my coat and satchel. Charlie, you young rascal, bring me a camp-chair out here where it is cool, and a match. Now,

Digitized by Google

then, what are you, Timon, Orlando, or Hamlet? How do you sleep? Do you know?"

"No. I have lost interest in the operation."

"Good. Can you eat without a menu, and stop without tipping somebody? Good. Does salt junk at certain ecstatic moments look to your purged vision like the staff of life? Good. You can't spread the morning paper out beside your plate and cram your brain and your stomach at the same time? Good. You'll live to be eighty-five if you keep on."

"Oh, you'd better tell me the plain truth at once. I can stand it."

"Dreams?"

"Every day. Can't quite shut off the rubbish of hopes and ambitions."

"Day be hanged. How about the night?"

"Oh, I don't know anything about the night. My system appears to have lost all interest in that."

"Then you're all right. Night is the only important part of a man's existence. It's the only time when he ought to stop kicking against the Eternal. If your nights are clean and empty, the unimportant days will take care of themselves. Man is such an infatuated suicide that Nature has to drug him once every twenty-four hours to keep him from destroying himself. Great Scott, what a luxury it is to get rid of a coat once more! Have you got another brier-wood pipe? Thank you. Say, old fellow," he continued, as he took the match from Charlie and lit the pipe, "did it

Digitized by Google

ever occur to you that man is an instrument, very nicely adjusted, but played upon so continuously by himself that he gets jangled? When he takes his hand off at night, the Great Tuner steps in and fixes up the strings. What kind of tobacco do you call that?"

I continued apologetic and tried to explain away my humble accommodations and prepare him for the monastic penance of being my guest. He only stripped off his necktie, unbuttoned his shirt, exposing his brawny and pilous neck. "Now, old chap, I'm going to take my shoes off if you don't object. I want to get my feet into that cool grass."

I understood very well what this luxury of looseness was. He walked up and down in the wire grass, smoking, a fine picture of dishevelled dignity. The grass was not very cool at that time of day, but the delight of believing that it was and the greater delight of freeing himself momentarily from the constrictions of conventional life was unmistakable.

"You can never know," he afterward said to me, "how tired a doctor gets of his species. It isn't that he only sees the worst side of it, but he must contemplate the infatuated determination of his race to be invalids, and the cool assumption of the race that doctors are made only to relieve it of some of the consequences of its own folly. That is what makes a man of my temperament desire to get somewhere at times where there are others than his own species."

Digitized by Google

"I should like to know," I asked, "if you include me in your species."

"Well, hardly. You're a good deal of a curiosity. The only patient I ever had who did what I told him. I was so incredulous that I had to come up here and see it with my own eyes. You deserve to live for ever."

"There wasn't much merit in it. You scared me into it."

He laughed.

"You were smart enough to rouse my will-power," I said, "to a panicky point of renunciation."

"Will-power. There you go. I've heard about will-power till it makes me weary. The whole finite world has gone crazy on will-power. There is a new quackery in the market made to fit it, which prescribes will-power instead of morphine. Exert your God-given volition, it cries, and rise above physical evil. But not one of its quacks can add or subtract a heart-beat by will-power, or contract an involuntary muscle. Will-power is the sovereign slave-driver of the material world. It removes mountains; but I'll be hanged for a mountebank if it can remove remorse or set the jig for an overridden heart. Man will go on with his will-power till he has used up all the material forces of this globe, and then, if he cannot get to any other, he will die of ennui. I always say to a patient of mine: 'Don't give me any of that will-power nonsense, if you please. Just take your hand off the machine for a little

Digitized by Google

while, and perhaps it will regulate itself. Did it ever occur to you that there might be some will-power in the universe lying around loose that wasn't yours?' If I can get a patient to stop self-focussing himself for a while, I feel quite certain that some kind of regulative energy will drift into him. Now, then, what time do you lunch?"

"Charlie," I said, "put on your apron and set out the hard-boiled eggs and crackers."

The Doctor was an old campaigner, and one who has been, never quite gets over the habits of it. He had slept in the snow, rolled up in a blue overcoat, so he told me, when campaigning with Crook, and had eaten raw pork between hardtack for breakfast, when the pork had to be chopped with a hatchet, and, said he, "I remember those savage meals pleasantly, and have forgotten all the dinners that I ate at the Holland House and Delmonico's. After all, there's nothing so relative as our gustatory zest. In fact, all our appetites are conditional. A man enjoys a meal very much as he enjoys female society—it depends on the scarcity."

"And the liberty," I said. "There is nothing so delightful as to be able to do as you please without fear of interruption."

"Very fine for a change, old chap, but make no mistake, it will not do for a steady thing. I cannot imagine any condition of existence so horribly full of ennui as absolute freedom would be. Fancy all obligations, all the dear old fetters, the very preservative weight of an atmosphere of duty, removed, and the monition of 'Thou shalt

Digitized by Google

not' abrogated, and man, like a fatherless Ishmaelite, wandering about in the desert of his own desires." He called in the door to Charlie: "Don't forget the cold pork and molasses." Then he resumed his walk in the grass. "It will not do, old fellow," he said; "we must have orbits, and gravitation to keep us in them, or there would be universal high jinks. If you don't mind, I'm going to take these suspenders off."

"Look here, Doctor," I said, "if you will take off your philosophy with your other duds and come back to your proper business and tell me what you think of my condition, you will do me a favour. Perhaps I am cured and can go back with you."

"You want to begin all over and get another warning."

"Then I'm not cured."

"You're convalescent — that's all. You must keep this jig up for one year. I do not propose to let up on my prescription, if you expect me to carry you through to a good old age. You see, I've got a good deal at stake in this matter. If I succeed in remaking you, I intend to start in on a new line of practice and open an office in the Yellowstone Park. You've been a pretty good boy so far. I did not believe you could do it. In fact, you're the first man I ever met who could give up female society entirely and take to the woods on sanitary principles, and you will make a shining example when you go back to Broadway and Wall Street."

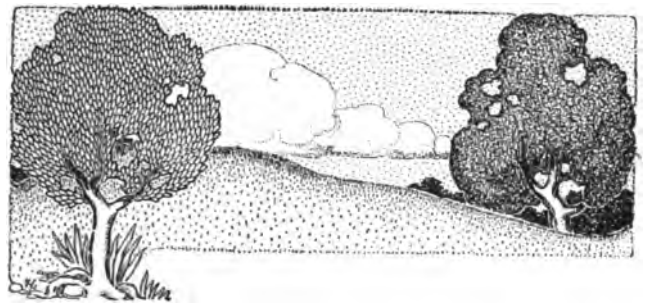
Digitized by Google

At that moment Charlie came to the door and shouted, "Say, Dad, where do you suppose Griselle keeps the pepper and salt?"

I remember that the Doctor, who looked very absurd in his bare feet, came over and stood in front of me, and said with as cavernous an intonation as he could command, "Who in thunder is Griselle?"



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER IX

THE LIGHT IN A DARK CELL

I HAVE never been shut up in a dark cell, but I have talked with men who have been, and I can readily understand why a prolongation of such punishment brings insanity with it. The best of us, who have what we call internal resources, break down at the sudden loss of our environment. We lose our bearings. The points of the compass disappear. Our relation to things is disturbed. We begin to grope after an adjustment. We turn and devour ourselves. To be lost in one's own abyss is insanity. Really, it is like the fabled act of the helpless reptile that plunges its fangs into its own body. Very few minds can stand the test of being driven in on themselves. And yet it is in those cloisters that we carry with us that we oftenest run across ourselves as we grope in the dark, and then, mayhap, we sit down and become our own father confessors.

Digitized by Google

Nothing can be more interesting than the experience of a man who has lived for years on the periphery of life, and is suddenly plunged into the dark of his own being. It is not unlike that other experience which most of us have had at some time, of waking up in a dark room at night and feeling that cold shadow of consciousness creeping upon us that we do not know where we are. In such experiences you try to remember where the window is or was, you try to make memory take the place of cognition, and undertake to reconstruct your place in the universe. But for the time being you have lost your own trail. Then there is a slight cold shudder in the soul for a moment. A voice cries out, "I am lost." It is only a passing spasm of the subconsciousness, but you never forget it. I think, myself, it is a prescient apprehension by the soul, and pre-figures in a dumb way the experience that awaits all souls when they pass from one condition of existence to another. I recall that once, at what purported to be a spiritual séance, an unexpected message was received from what claimed to be a spirit — one who had been a very dissolute, but withal a very lovable man. It came among a number of incoherent, impossible, and puerile messages, and threw a momentary chill on the party. The question that had been put was, "Where are you, Bob?" and the answer was, "Wandering in the cold and dark between time and eternity."

A man can try the dark-cell experiment by

Digitized by Google

being his own jailer and locking himself up in the wilderness, as I did. At least so I thought when I executed the feat of banishing myself from the mode of existence to which I had become habituated. For a month I went through very much the same experience that attends the waking up in a strange dark room. I had left my environment behind me, not because I had lost the desire for it, but because it had betrayed the intention of killing me ruthlessly and suddenly. One of two changes was offered me. I was to abandon my existence or my habits. If one should, with the magic power of Aladdin's lamp, transport a man from the seething Board of Brokers and set him down in the still waste of the Syrian desert, the change would not be more absolute than was mine. The Doctor's prescription was, "Come back to Hecuba." I thought at the time that I had the choice of leaving this world or staying in its most endurable dark cell, and I chose to stay. Doubtless it was the pusillanimity of a man of the world. The only result that is worth telling is this — that, if a man manages it properly, he can rob the dark cell of all its horrors, and get comfortably out of the world without bothering the undertaker. But why pursue that figure any further? The dark cell belongs exclusively to the punitive side of man's hallucination. My experiment at first was very much like the dearth of midnight, for the glare and shock of the world had been shut off. But no sooner had I accepted the loss

Digitized by Google

obediently, and the dark of isolation had encompassed me, than out came the stars, one by one, and, as my little world receded, the universes whispered to me across the eternal gaps. Those sibylline voices are very restful, when your ear is once purged of the artificial clang and has recovered its primal vibrations.

Had I been an artist or an entomologist, my equipment would have enabled me to defy the ennui of solitude. But, alas, I was neither. I could not come to Nature like the gifted robber-artist who steals her secrets and lugs them off to his gallery, like so much plunder, with the hieroglyphs rubbed off. That admirable marauder whose mission it is to inform Nature how she ought to do it is sustained in swamps and deserts by a missionary fervour. I had not even the warrant of that other despoiler, the sportsman, who corrects Nature with a gun, and wounds and kills, even when he cannot eat, with a robust masculine joyousness. That superior quality which in the entomologist is called analysis, and which can box the compass of a bug when he is properly pinned down, with the dismembering acumen of a musical critic who tears the quivering semi-quavers from a symphony, and lays them out to dry in a criticism — that wonderful gift has been denied me. I was myself pinned down by Nature to a dull, obedient synthesis. I was born so barren of the divine mastership that I believed most musical criticisms were the attempt to explicate an implication — that music was not made to be

Digitized by Google

analyzed or explained, any more than a prayer, but to be accepted and obeyed. Such a spirit as mine would never have conquered the earth. I acknowledge it. The only question is, could such a spirit understand the earth, and would the world say anything confidential to it? I was under constitutional bonds not to interfere, but to listen. I was looking for nepenthe. Something said to me it is not a drug, but an adjustment. Perhaps it was the Doctor. I was not to disturb anything in the laboratory.

I dare say I astonished my new environment both of animate and inanimate nature. Perhaps it was not accustomed to such a spirit as mine. Now that I look back at the experiment, I can fancy Nature saying, "What have we here? Is this our lord and master, or has an invalid Francis of Assisi come out of Wall Street; does not want to put our birds in cages and our flowers in a herbarium to corroborate his own theories; does not want to cut anything down or tear anything up; can he be entirely human? Perhaps, when he dies, if he ever should, he will refuse to be put into a casket, and will let us get at him atom by atom, and lift him benignly along in our procession. Treat him gently, O winds, and enter softly into him, O sunshine, and all you myriad messengers of the air, breathe your inarticulate secrets to him."

Such indeed was the compensation, softly to glimmer like star-points in my exile, as the months slipped by. And what was the secret? Dull

Digitized by Google

mortal that I am, it was told me in effluence, but not till long afterward did I find it written on the deep pages of my experience, like the embroidery of God in the Milky Way and in the marsh. I have tried many times since to get that secret into words, but words are so brittle that they break down helplessly with the weight of a truth that is like an atmosphere. There are some secrets, like the ether, for which words have not been invented. One day when I thought I had caught the feat of fitting the ether to syllables, I wrote down, "Before freedom can be, obedience is." It had all the ethereal disadvantages of an abstraction trying to perform a concrete trick. How barren the proposition was beside the Psalm that had sung itself into my comprehension through all those months. How far away from the ineffable eloquence which had said without words: "Behold, all things but man are under law, and man must come voluntarily under it before he can be part of the scheme. To him alone it is allowed to return. So do we live and obey and die that he may learn the lesson."

Upon a man's capacity to emit a glow-worm ray of his own will depend the darkness of his cell and the limitations of it. There are men and women who have so perverted their natures that they live entirely through their superficies, and that kind of life which furnishes continual external stimulation converts them, in time, to hollow resounding shells, silent, indeed, unless they are beat upon. We all know men the greater part of whose lives

Digitized by Google

are spent looking at the procession. They would be of about as much use to themselves in a dark room as would a mirror. They are decrepit infants, who must be fed continually by the spoon of circumstance. Whenever things lose their motion, they, too, lose theirs, as if they were mere cogs in the social machinery. Their experience is about as interesting as a book of old playbills. That was what Goethe meant when he said that the ordinary man is content to see something going on. He is content because he does not have to go on himself.

Probably conscience has a great deal to do with a man's disinclination to be left alone with himself. When one has nobody to look at but himself, he is apt to be not only bored but frightened. One's mistakes and follies always look more formidable when one is alone. Conscience is like a photographer — it shuts off the general glare, gets the light focussed and subdued, and out comes the expression that belongs to you. I confess that at first I acted like the ordinary man (that I am). I hankered, pined, growled, complained, and looked over my shoulder at the disturbance that I missed. I was dreadfully bored because nothing was going on. And mind you, the immeasureable procession of the universe was jogging right along as before. Not a cog had been slipped in the tremendous plan, but I felt that it had because I was no longer on exhibition. There is a Chinese adage which says that our hopes are our friends, but our desires are our children; and there was I,

Digitized by Google

like the old woman who lived in a shoe, surrounded by my brood, all clamouring. It was my heroic duty to starve them to death.

But such is the gentle efficacy of the gold cure under the autumn leaves that if one will only stay in the sanitarium of outdoors long enough and keep still and listen, he will begin to see some things more clearly. I was trying to think of a similitude that would convey to you some idea of those kindly intimations that are made by the external world when one is thoroughly receptive, and I recalled a trivial incident which had for me at the time a peculiar eloquence. Charlie and I had passed the winter resolutely in that hut, growing very intimate indeed, and spending many precious hours huddling over our wood fire during the long nights when the storms raged and the hut creaked and trembled. We had been very brave, I am sure, to have stood it out, but the winter was long, and we were waiting and pining for the spring. The days and weeks crawled sluggishly along. We counted them regularly on the calendar, and watched with childish eagerness that receding sunshine on the wall which was an index of the solstice. We longed for the end of it all. One night I opened the window to fasten the shutter. I think it was in April. It was very still, and I heard the first faint peep from the milldam. Such weak, timorous, thin little elfin voices, *peep*, *peep*. But there was a keen, arrowy heralding in the note. The earth was stirring. I called Charlie. "What

Digitized by Google

is it?" he said. "It's spring, Comrade," I replied. And then we had a little war-dance in which the yellow dog joined.

I never heard those tiny birth-pangs of the season afterward, without a little quickening of the pulse. Once you get on intimate terms with this Not Me, who strums her zithers and thunders her open diapasons, she will have many pleasant surprises for you. You will discover, by degrees, that she is a blood relation. She recognizes the same Father and knew him before you did. After that you shake hands with the trees and salute the winds familiarly as they pass. Then you learn, possibly, that Nature is not æsthetic. She struggles just as hard as any artist after an unseen prototype, but it is because she is under orders. She is as austere as a Puritan, in her duty, and never by any possibility bothers with sentimentalism. We always bring that nonsense to her in our kits and our albums. She stands up to her work with a rigid invincibility that makes an æsthete shiver, and offers up her offspring as unquestioningly as did Abraham, and so well drilled are all her countless myriads that there is not a blade of grass hidden from the eye that does not strive as hard as it can to live and die for something other than itself.

So it was, that in the smoky confines of our far-away hut, swept by bleak storms or shone on by yellow sunshine, Charlie and I sat through the seasons, humbly, like the squirrels that we often heard under our floor, playing at bowls with

Digitized by Google

their hickory nuts. We were learning to wait and getting strong and calm with the sure Balm of Gilead, for the time when we were to sally forth and take up our fight uncomplainingly and faithfully, like the dumb friends we were to leave behind.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER X

THE GLORY OF THE WAY

AFTER a prolonged hot spell in late August, we usually get that transformation scene that has cool reminders in it of the golden age. A shower in the afternoon hisses and splashes on the hot earth, and then dies out lingeringly in what the farmers call a "drizzle-drozzle." It rains well on through the night softly. You can almost hear the muskmelons and tomatoes saying thanks. But the sun comes up unobscured in the morning, burning in a fathomless blue that you seldom see anywhere outside of the Orient, and calling to mind that tongue-twisting line of Baildon's, —

"Palely blue lucent, one great undulent gem,"

only it is not "palely," but pronouncedly violet in the unflecked gulfs of it. This is the annunciation of Fall. It is usually a very showy ceremonial, and a very old one, from which, long ago,

Digitized by Google

Attica caught the feast of Demeter and mingled jewels with the sheaves in joyful celebration. But man could not, even in his Grecian moods, when he loaded Ceres with poppies and gems, do more than mimic with his stage properties the whelming brilliancy and necromancy of such a morning.

Ceres is preserved to us only in philology. She comes to us through Germany as Hertha, out of which grew our word "earth," and it is the earth that flashes her with all her gems across our vision after the late rains. The largesse of it at six o'clock in the morning is dazzling. Every tendril wears a tiara. The currant bushes, that could never decorate themselves with anything more pretentious than strings of garnets, now blaze with diamonds and burn with rubies. The meanest weed that grows is heavy with diadems. There is nothing so poor that it cannot throw back an iridescent greeting to the sun.

This prismatic jubilate lasts only half an hour. The winds come up and gather the queen's jewels, and the shadows creep along and put out the lights. But even then, one ceremonial merges into another in confluent evanescences. Nothing that is beautiful stays. Even the shadows, that have such a rich wine-coloured depth at this time, pull themselves out in a cycle, and the cool winds are hastening seaward. The very charm of it is its transitoriness. The queen does not always sit on exhibition with her jewels on. It is well that man cannot stay the festival. He would fasten it, if he could, and make a museum or a mauso-

Digitized by Google

leum of it. He is so afraid of the divine processes and so blind to the glory of going on that he tries to petrify his own perishing body when the life is out of it. Never does he show himself such a dog in the manger as when he embalms himself.

Nature is forever emitting a pleasant irony at our scale of values, trying to tell us that it is not that which endures, but that which is transformed, that best answers her equitable purpose. One can easily fancy that in some other condition of existence than ours, the evanescent best conforms to the enduring, seeing that existence in any conceivable state cannot be static, but must still be going on. That was rather a pretty conceit of Swedenborg's that the best spirits in another world continually grow young. I say a "conceit," but now I think of it, how do I know it is a conceit? With our scale of values we lapse continually into a primitive admiration for magnitude. Great distances, measureless periods of time — how Tyndall revelled in one and Proctor in the other, and how awe-struck their audiences were at the effectiveness of meaningless magnitude. But there is a continual intimation in Nature that mere bulk and prodigiousness are not ranked so high in her scale of values as in ours. She certainly endows a pismire with more communal intelligence than an ox, and spends as much ingenuity on a mushroom as on an oak. Who can say with accurate knowledge that our measurement of time by the revolutions of the earth fits all conditions of existence

Digitized by Google

and extends beyond man to unseen communities which round up their affairs and die between sunrise and sunset? Who shall say that our subdivision of hours bears any reference to the compacted lives that measure their destinies by moments? Do we not get occasionally in dreams, and still more vividly in those marvellous syntheses of thought and feeling that attend sudden disaster, as for example in the premonition of drowning, some startling evidences that the faculties of the mind can transcend time altogether? Who shall deny that the fennel and June grass and the downy gerardia, that have their successions both of beauty and duty under the spreading oak branches, and have matured and given up their stored substance year after year to the arsenal of the earth, have not been toiling like the coral mite to help build the overshadowing bank of greenery? Read Darwin's biography of the earthworm.

That side of our natures which gives heed only to the prodigious is very apt to become theatric, and occasionally, like the manager of the show, try to impress us with the magnitude rather than the worth of the exhibition.

I recall an incident of the last year of my academic days. Trivial as it is, it fits pleasantly in here. Our professor of physics, an amiable old fellow, but slightly tinctured with Buchner, took some kind of delight in belittling man and his planet. Now and then it would creep out, a mild pessimism, that took the shape of illustra-

Digitized by Google

tion or passing reference. One day he called our attention to the late Dr. John W. Draper's book, "The History of the Conflict between Religion and Science,' which had just appeared and was attracting much attention. It had made a deep impression on him, and nothing would do but he must read a page of it to the class, as a fine example of insight and eloquence. The eminent author had turned aside for a moment from his historical thesis to show that man belonged among the atoms and was startlingly insignificant when compared to the celestial bulks; and this is what our professor read us, with solemn face and deep tremulous voice:—

> Seen from the sun, the earth dwindles away to a mere speck, a mere dust-mote glistening in his beams. If the reader wishes a more precise valuation, let him hold a page of this book a couple of feet from his eye and then let him consider one of the dots or full stops. That dot is several hundred times larger in surface than is the earth as seen from the sun. Of what consequence then can such an almost imperceptible particle be? One might think that it could be removed or even annihilated and never be missed. Of what consequence is one of those human monads on the surface of this all but invisible speck, of whom scarcely one will leave a trace that he has ever existed? Of what consequence is man, his pleasures or his pains? — DRAPER'S "Conflict," International Scientific Series, p. 174.

The unanswerable interrogation with which our professor rounded up this quotation, a kind of

Digitized by Google

complacent defiance, did not quite dispel a feeling in the class that there was an aching void in the rhetoric. You know how a class of quick instinctive young minds will be annoyed by a galloping sophism that they cannot put their fingers on. It is like that one mosquito that blows his small but mellow horn in the dark, and you slap the wrong place and wish you might see him. A rather stupid and vacuous silence fell on the class, as if the professor had straggled into moonshine, but nobody could tell how or where. Then up rose Bannister, dear old Bannister — he who had not only translated but interpreted the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil between prayers and praxis, as easily, so it seemed to us dullards, as he had feathered a stroke oar. His handsome face wore the livery of outdoors. His brown eye flashed a little with the light that comes regularly on land and sea. He was one of those intuitional fellows who occasionally rush past facts to a truth. He was continually arriving by cutting across lots. He was made up of moods of indifference and moments of inspiration. As he stood there fumbling his text-book of biology and feeling after words to express himself, I was fresh and imaginative enough to believe at the moment that he was the voice that we had all lost.

"On behalf of insignificant man," he said, "of whom I am the most insignificant example, I beg to put in a disclaimer, and with all respect to Dr. Draper to protest against his method of measuring the value of things by the distance at which

Digitized by Google

you get away from them. Seen from the sun, of what value is the earth? Seen from Saturn, of what value is the sun? Seen from Alpha Centauri, of what value is Saturn? If you take space enough, of what value is anything? I don't know how it is with this class, but I for one cannot make a practical application of the brutal scale which Dr. Draper calls 'a more precise valuation.' According to such an inverse appraisement, one's affection and admiration for one's own mother will depend on her not leaving the room. If she should go to the country, of what value would such an insignificant speck be? I think we ought to tremble for Moses and Plato and Shakspere as they diminish along their starry orbits."

I believe some of us laughed with just the least bit of malicious exultation. But Bannister was seriously in for it. He flashed up, and the words began to fuse and flow.

"If you will permit me, sir," he said, "I lay last night on my back on a softly undulating deck and listened to the great dialogue between my soul and the universe. I climbed the stairway of the galaxies into fields of light that billowed out to the farthest boundaries of space. I passed flaming suns, all journeying on, and swept through vortexes of whirling worlds, but it never occurred to me, sir, to drag a surveyor's chain with me and stake off the distances for the belittling of myself. I confess that no finite mind can take this flight along the highway of

Digitized by Google

creation without trembling a little at the glory of the way. But the pilgrim soul will feel the fanning of his own wing, and the inconceivably small shall rise up against the amplitudes of space, and summon with a finite will a million flashing messages from as many suns and register them on a retina no bigger than the capital O in this book. The infinitesimal commands the incalculable. If such a soul, feeling itself lost in an eternity of matter, should throw the interrogation of the Psalmist into that flaming vault and ask, 'What is man that thou shouldst consider him?' that soul has but to listen, and the answer reaches across the centuries, 'Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels.' I am content, sir, to travel with that answer not only across the years, but across the chasms of the universe, and somewhere on the journey I shall be sure to meet that kindred thought, emitted by another monad who saw in man something greater than the leagues he traversed, and who exclaimed, 'In apprehension, how like a god.'"

Then we all broke out in applause, in which the professor generously joined. Afterward he had the hardihood to say in a sly way that he knew how to wake up Bannister's theological idiosyncrasy.

It was this kind of high-stepping improvisation that distinguished Bannister. He came from Kentucky, where one can still detect in the perfervid declamation of her gifted sons some resonances of Henry Clay, and hear words pacing along

Digitized by Google

the old Appian Way of eloquence. All efforts to make Bannister academic were more or less fruitless. He would not or could not dig laboriously at the text-books. If he could not absorb a theme along the lines of his emotions, the labour of it discouraged him. "What is the use of wasting time with human guesses," he said to me, "when one can converse with the truth itself, by putting his hand in that of the solitudes and walking humbly with the silences? After all, Nature confides the ultimates that Aristotle only groped at." I grew to love Bannister very much during that last year of our companionship, but it needed the after-perspective to understand him. I often thought then that he was a seer. I can see now that he was only an orator. But his oratory was strangely affluent with the fecundity and waste of Nature. Those of us who heard him afterward, when he held multitudes spellbound, recall how like he was to one of those great Western rivers that wind sluggishly along in narrow channels, carrying the soil with them, but liable at any moment to whelm their banks and spread flashingly into broad lagoons, rich with floating islands and the plunder of zones. Then it was that his shoreless volubility rose with Miltonic periods and bellowed grandly through the deeps of time, and his emotions swept us away like those waves that "o'erthrew Busiris and his Memphian chivalry."

How much of this gift was the bestowal of Isis herself, when he had lifted her curtain lying on his back under the stars, who shall say? And

Digitized by Google

yet I cannot quite divest myself of the suspicion that the solitudes had given him grace of utterance. It seems to be the lesson of natural eloquence that Nature's educational course makes some of the nobler and deep-buried appetencies of the soul imitate the grasses of the field and spring their tender blades in waste places. More than once I have noticed that those speakers who are most effective have studied the book that was never written. Eloquence, unlike wit, feeds itself in unfrequented glades. The American savage, who is never an inventor or a philosopher, is very often an orator. The speeches of Red Jacket and Sitting Bull have a large Roman vibration like the echo of a strong voice in the woods.

In those academic days we were swept off our feet by successive literary waves. We had Goethe freshets, and, later, Carlyle inundations, when we talked in the Chelsea dialect and called our professors "Sea-Green" and "Teufelsdrockh," and tried, absurdly enough, in our dormitories, to "welter in the immensities" and balance the "Tartarian darks" on the tips of our tongues. Then there was a year when we all went off with Balzac, and neglected everything but our pipes and beer, in making obeisance to Parisian analyses. But Bannister never joined in the fellowcraft worship at these shrines. Effloresce as he might at the top, his roots remained fixed in the American soil. I believe he tugged at Goethe assiduously and plodded through the "Comédie Humaine," as if to see what it was all about.

Digitized by Google

But it was no use. He regarded Goethe very much as a Puritan might regard a good statue of Buddha, with curiosity and awe, but without a throb of sympathy. He told me himself that when he read Balzac he felt like a man who had been through a vast national museum, and was not permitted to bring anything away with him. On a little shelf in his room he had a copy of Milton, a much-bethumbed volume of Pascal's "Pensées," and a Shakspere, with the regulation mother's Bible that could be found in all our rooms with diligent searching, but generally poked in between Dumas and Daudet. From that small library Bannister drew refreshment that we knew nothing of, and now that the years have given me a clearer vision of Nature and man, I can see that those books opened vistas to him not unlike those he had seen when lying on his back.

And now that I have run afield in this inexcusable manner, I ought to apologize. I set out to exalt the small things and have not said a word about myself. Thus is one's most precious egotism reduced to a postscript when he remembers. I was reminded of Bannister by the rich August hedgerows, where the cardinal-flower already burns and the fringed gentian will follow in unexpected places, and the smell of the wild grapes will make the air reel with a Grecian tipsiness. All these wildings of Nature have disappeared from the haunts of man. He plucks them up by the roots and plants his hard, dry chrysanthemums in geometrical dreariness.

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XI

ON A PORCH

IT takes ordinary men like myself about forty years to learn the alphabet of living. We start in with a conquering sword, shouting "Excelsior," and mistaking intensity of emotion for integrity of being. At ten we believe all things; at twenty we dare all things; at thirty we obtain all things; at forty, we question all things. If we arrive at fifty, we bow our heads and are silent. We have arrived with many scars at either a conclusion or a conviction. If by any means we reach a conviction, it will be shadowed by an enormous waste and tinged with a reproach that we have missed the preservative equilibrium. Ghosts of a lost condition peer and smile ironically in our memories and glide through our dreams.

I suppose the ultimate punishment of man in this world is the accomplishment of his desires. In looking back at my summer in the solitary

Digitized by Google

woods, I find that very little of it remains but the equable and uneventful light of it. If I try to recall what was disagreeable or annoying, I have to refer to notes made at the time, and those notes are for the most part meaningless now and strangely superfluous, bearing the implication that the annoyances of life are not to be preserved, and inferentially that the forces that make up real life preserve themselves without our special wonder. How trite the dear old trees were, how platitudinous and self-possessed. How unoriginal and reiterative were the seasons, doing just the same things over and over from the beginning. How undemonstrative, regular, and plodding the sunshine was, how incapable of a new departure. In our callow days we placed a Grecian Aurora in our sunrise. She always wore a saffron robe and came out of a golden palace with a torch in her hand. But how purely infantile that conception is to the ordinary sage like myself, who has been introduced to her and enjoyed her homely hospitality. Instead of being a frisky nymph, calling attention to her flights, like a ballerina or a Bernhardt, she is an old woman, attending to her regular routine with precise decorum. If you accept that similitude for a moment, it will grow clearer to you as you remember. It was the old woman's benign regularity that we never thought of at the time, but that was an awful deprivation when it was gone. What did we know about her unseen traction that kept us planets and comets in our courses,

Digitized by Google

and went with us into the far-off spaces to round our orbits and bring us back at some time? What did we then know of the deposits of light, layer upon layer, that in the alchemy of serene love was to turn our carbon into chlorophyl, and make a golden age for us in the bottom of our souls?

When I went off to the woods with my one eight-year-old scion, I had something like fifty thousand exigent things on my mind that enlisted my interest and demanded concentration of thought. It isn't necessary to make a list of them. Refer to your own schedule. I was really lopsided with events and sore with the world's goings on. I used to get up in the morning, heave a sigh, and take up the universal load. I had to sympathize with the Armenians. I had to denounce a Tory Government. I had to form a theory of the latest murder mystery. I had to keep my eye on the Berlin market. London and Paris were tapping at my window before I had taken my coffee. I had to circumvent Tracy, and outbid Jackson, and balk Williams. I had to make more money than I needed, because there were several fellows who had more than I had. I had to keep abreast of Wagner and the latest novel, or I couldn't hold my own with the ladies in the evening. I had some interests in a mine and some in a railroad. They were not fixed. Nothing was fixed. Uncertainty about things in general was a devouring stimulant. I was getting to be permanently anxious

Digitized by Google

about the drift of everything. In such a condition, the fine spiculæ of a man's sensibilities get knocked off. I had to have something sharper each day to keep up my interest. The artificial vivacities of the playhouse were growing tiresome and lacked shock. I noticed that wine was losing its tang, and beauty was overdone. Everything was wearing off its edges. I needed a new sensation.

I found it in a child, a maid, and a yellow dog. If I had found it in Paris, or Baden, or in mountain climbing, or in jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge, it would have been conventional, but would not be worth the telling. When a man who begins to find that absinthe is not half as strong as people think is suddenly put on milk diet, he has the best chance of his life to be not only original, but piquant. At least he discovers a lot of things that are not usually thought to be worth discovering. We start life with a milk diet. Did it ever occur to you that there is a terrible irony in being brought round to it again by the doctor? I suppose you are familiar with a banal phrase about "bringing a man to his milk."

If I learned anything in the woods, it was this: that the true piquancy of life often consists in getting rid of the piquancy. I thought at one time that I was cut out for a young Napoleon of finance. Perhaps I was, but I didn't know how to catch eels or scrape new potatoes. I wanted to operate largely, but I "snapped" and became tutor to my own boy. I used to look around disdainfully for

Digitized by Google

a combination of Hypatia and Maintenon that I might fall in love with it, and I was paralyzed by a rustic handmaiden. I had believed that an intellect like mine would assert its mastership of the world, and a yellow dog wagged his tail at me with esoteric authority. As for the Florentine maid who came regularly and beamed round us, I am bound to say now that she was the sunshine of many rainy hours and left layers of impalpable light in our recollections. It was providentially ordered that she should drop out of the clouds, as it were, without any prevision on our part. If I had offered to pay her for her services, she would have vanished offended. It was a neighbourly arrangement, unmarred by any contracts. She could just as well as not run over and look after things; "a child like that should not be left alone in the woods," she said; so I agreed that she should keep one eye on Charlie. I say one eye, because even while I made the proposition there was a non-committal twinkle in the other.

There is not a blasé man living who has not a niche in his constitution for a Gretchen, and there is not a Gretchen who will not come some time, like a song sparrow, and twitter in it, to fly away again when she gets through. This circumambient freshness had begun to build a nest in my heart before I knew it. I don't believe she knew it herself. It was a general instinct of nidification on her part, and I suppose that such nests began to take form wherever she lit. It is worth mentioning because it was part of the resurgence of

Digitized by Google

past conditions under a milk diet. I understand now that you cannot fasten yourself down to curds and whey without waking up the Strephon who has been biding his time in your bones, and finding yourself going about at times with an oaten pipe that you do not know what to do with.

The first month I called Griselle "my young lady" with a fine sense of reserve. The second month I called her "Griselle" with an easy sense of compromise. The third month I occasionally addressed her as "my dear" with guarded paternal composure, and as nobody started at it, I adopted that phrase. By the time I had recovered my appetite so that I could eat a hunk of bread with school-boy zest, and would not have flinched if it had been spread with New Orleans molasses, I began to discover traits of character in Griselle, which was very much like my discovering that the sun rose and set, and the brook water ran down hill, — two facts that I had never before observed with interest. The young woman did not belong to my social domain, but whether those traits were paradisaical or merely primitive, I did not stop to inquire. The light that glimmered was tenuous, but it came from a great distance like starlight. It nourished dreams.

Things had come to this pass when the Doctor arrived at the cabin to join me in a week's savagery, as he called it, and to come back to first principles. No better man to give me lessons existed. He showed me the masculine way of it; how to throw a fly; how to eat tomatoes off the vines like apples,

Digitized by Google

without even salt; how to roast corn in the ashes; how to study sociology over an ant-hill; how to sleep on fir boughs and make raw potato salad; how to skin bullheads, which, by the way, you could not tell from weakfish when he fried them.

I opened my mind to the Doctor, as we smoked our pipes under melancholy boughs.

"What do you think of that young woman, Griselle?" I asked with studied carelessness.

"Good, healthy, and rather pretty country wench," he replied, "but I have not thought about her. Let me advise you not to."

"Why not? Is she not part of the scheme?"

"Yes; her scheme."

"Absurd. You do her great injustice. She has no more scheme than a chipmunk."

"You are falling in love with her, my son. I noticed it almost as soon as she did."

"Supposing such a preposterous thing possible, would it be altogether unnatural or imprudent?"

"Highly natural and decidedly imprudent."

"She is very fond of Charlie. Genuine maternal instinct. Think of the boy."

"Let him marry her when he comes of age."

"Seriously, would it not be a good thing for me to contemplate some such person with a view to his future?"

"What does the young lady say to the scheme?"

"She doesn't know anything about it, of course."

"Figs! She probably knows all about it."

Digitized by Google

"I have not spoken a word to her."

"It was not necessary."

"If she had any suspicion of my serious intentions she would have shown it."

"Then she would not be a fresh, ingenuous thing. You don't know them. They never tell their secrets even to themselves. They keep them locked up in a casket like jewels, and if they ever take them out to look at them, they lock the door and turn the gas down first."

"Try and be practical a moment to accommodate me. I admire the young woman's qualities of mind and heart, and I sometimes feel a desire to rescue them. What are you laughing at?"

"I am laughing at the unexpected success of my treatment. This exceeds anything that I hoped for."

"What exceeds it?"

"The triumphant manner in which you have adapted yourself to the infant and the yellow dog, and renewed your youth. Say, if you can do this every twenty-five years, you will live to be a hundred."

"You are disposed to treat the matter flippantly. It isn't of vital importance, and I'll say no more about it."

"Yes, it is. It is simply beautiful. It crowns my theory with a new wreath."

"Oh, hang your theory."

"No, no. I expected to make a man of you physically, and I'll be hanged if the treatment hasn't made a youth of you. Talk about elixir!

Digitized by Google

Sees traits of mind and character and wants to mould them in a higher sphere. Lovely, lovely, in four months too. Hang me if I don't get a cabin up here myself and restore my unbounded belief in the therapeutic sex. You wouldn't mind if I wrote the case up for the County Medical Association, would you? No names mentioned."

"Yes. I object. You don't understand the case at all."

"Don't I? Would you like me to make a prognosis?"

"Certainly not, as you do not understand the case."

"Pardon me—"

"Pardon me, Doctor."

I believe we both scowled a little at each other, and then the Doctor broke into a laugh.

"If you had not got mad," he said, "I should have doubted my theory. The next thing to do is to get jealous. Oh, I went through this when I was eighteen. When a man goes through it at forty-four, there is hope for him. You ought to be proud of my treatment."

Something like a comic coolness ensued for half a day, and we "sir'd" each other. Then it broke down, and we both laughed it off, but I am bound to say that the Doctor made no allusion to the affair when the girl was present, though he noticed her with a critical interest.

My acquaintance with Griselle grew in its own unobtrusive way so slyly that I can hardly tell where it began. I think that perhaps I came

Digitized by Google

nearer to understanding her and even to admiring her during the few hours I spent with her on the porch of the Hotchkiss "Folly." The nymph passed into the woman during those lazy summer hours when she was not flitting before my eyes, but was in sober repose, listening to me. I trace it all back to that old porch, and therefore I shall have to tell you about it: It was the common kind, twelve feet wide, fifty feet long, roofed and shingled. Viewed from above, it was difficult to tell where the house ended and the porch began. An old-fashioned balustrade ran along its outer edge, with here and there a broken baluster and a sagging hand-rail. There were wide steps, slightly concave with the tread of generations. They descended to a grass-grown road, and at their two sides there were rank bunches of phlox and nasturtiums, dissolutely intertwined, with spears of timothy sticking out of the tangle. There, too, sprang the Virginia creeper and the wild-grape vine that climbed the pillars and festooned the spaces between, making, as Gabe Hotchkiss said, "a pooty bad job when we come to paint the house." But we never came to paint it; you could see that by the fantastic streaks the broken leaders made. Late in the summer the morning-glories still distribute their trumpets all through the vines, and the wrens quarrel there as of old, I dare say. Sometimes a hummingbird vibrates above one of the blooms, and so impalpable is he that you might take him to be the spirit of the flower trying to disentangle him-

Digitized by Google

self. You cannot tell where the tissuey corolla ends and the wings begin.

You can easily imagine the house. The big doors open from the porch into a spacious hallway, running straight through, and making a cool vista, with more phlox and wild-grape vines in the perspective. On Sundays Gabe sits there by the hall table and reads the religious weekly through his iron spectacles.

This old porch is a spacious bowery and slumbrous *vestibulum*, always referred to by the occupant of the house as "the stoop"; always designated by the minister when he makes his visit as "the veranda," and always dignified by summer boarders, if they come from the city, by the name of "pe-azzer" or balcony, unless they are Southerners, and then they call it "the gallery." But whether they draw their nomenclature from the Greek, the Italian, the Spanish, or fetch it from Holland, they accept the big run-around as a delightful compromise of outdoors and in; and in its hammocky days, as you may imagine by the rusty old hooks on some of the pillars, it wooed luxurious visitors to quiet dreams with elfin orchestras.

These old porches are like the prefaces to old books in which the author spreads a broad invitation and calls you "gentle reader." They always hold out homely arms of hospitality, though, to be sure, looked at from a little distance, they are more like brooding wings. They mark in the growing civilization the transition

Digitized by Google

of domestic life from stress and peril to peace and prosperity. When the big porch came in, the block-house and the stockade went out. Defiance gave way to invitation. Always to the far-away country home, the porch is a gracious neutral ground between the exclusiveness of the home and the impertinence of the world — why not say, enchanted ground, and be done with it, for really that old porch at the Hotchkiss house had its unsubstantial enchantment. A rarefied atmosphere hung over it. The odour of it comes back to me with vague associations as I write this. It had a flavour of its own, distilled, one might say, by time, as we have it in old wine. The spruce shingles and flooring had absorbed a distinctive bouquet from the years as if the sun had baked them to a memorial ripeness. It was faintly balsamic and evasive, as is the odour of sweet clover, that you cannot trace like a fact, but must accept like a presence.

One does not need to be either a sensualist or a sentimentalist to be wholesomely affected by the inanimate serenities. I should dislike very much to be thought incapable of separating an odour from an orison, or an æsthetic thrill from an aspiration, and yet the atmosphere of the old porch, of which I was scarcely conscious at the time, must have been making its deposit while I was thinking of other things. Mine has not been a luxurious nor an idle life. It is well marked by the scars of endeavour, and there are in it such ordinary triumphs as come to all ordinary men. But on

Digitized by Google

more than one occasion, when achievement had been wrought through incalculable stress, and the triumph seemed very hollow by the side of the outlay — on such occasions, I say, and on others, when it seemed that all the malign forces of the universe were arrayed against me, and I began to doubt the moral government of the world, feeling that the best a man can do is to fold his arms and set his teeth with Greek defiance, and bid the gods work their worst — then there has come a filmy recollection of Gabe Hotchkiss asleep in his Quaker rocker, with his weekly paper on the floor, and the cool scented wind coming lazily through that hall, lifting his gray locks softly, without waking him, and I have wondered, just for a moment, if he did not have the best of it.

All these things come back to a man over lost hours, bringing the scents with them. I must have spent some time on that old porch. Does any one suppose that its antique flavour, or even its morning-glories that made cathedral windows of the vines at sunrise, were the enchantment? I am sure I did not give particular heed to them while the girl, Griselle, was present. But now, the summer odours, the cool rustling of the leaves, the architecture of the sky on the western side of the house at sunset, the gradient colours of the intervening fields, and that musky odour of the old wood, and the girl herself, are all parts of one composition. The dry bones of the Hotchkiss genealogy took on some kind of life when this girl touched them in our conversation. The old

Digitized by Google

house had been there half a century. It must have been in its first period very patriarchal, with a lordly air of domain and much riches on hoof and in sheaves. I take it that this was the grandfather period in the Hotchkiss chronology. By a little adroit questioning, Griselle filled in some of the gaps as best she could, partly from hearsay, partly from the old Bible, and partly by straight tradition through her uncle Gabe.

Why should I be interested in all this, which is the commonplace history of so many American homes? I will tell you why. First of all, the commonplace is very apt to be the enduring elemental thing upon which the shocks and vivacities of life fasten themselves for your mere divertisement. In the next place the girl was inscrutably interesting to me as she thus unconsciously tied herself to all these antecedents, which had woven her to what she was. Can there be anything more delightful to the admiring intellect than the genesis of a girl thus artlessly set forth without the suspicion on her part that she is exhibiting formative and converging lines of her nature?

There had been a great-grandmother Hotchkiss, and the more you stirred the dust of the old manse, the more distinctly her figure rose out of the past. There was hunted up for me an old miniature, no bigger than one of those morning-glories, painted by Elliot, and in it one saw the same pensive blue eyes, with the same slightly oblique lines, the same tawny hair, but now fall-

Digitized by Google

ing in side ringlets on a staid coiffure, and the same lift of the head on a quietly imperative neck, that were only a few feet from me close to the wild-grape vine.

"Tell me all about her," I said. "These old mothers were the salt of the earth. Do you know that you look like her a little?"

Yes, she had been told that often enough when she was younger and the Hotchkisses came thick about the house on Christmas times. "But, dear me, I'm not at all like her, for she was what Uncle Billy Hotchkiss called a grand dame."

"Uncle Billy was probably right. What did he tell you about her? Really, this interests me deeply."

She tried to recall the old man's account, probably garrulous *disjecta membra*, and I, with a surprising patience, listened attentively, and looked on with admiration. It was very much as if a pair of white hands were taking to pieces one of those old bits of rag carpet, and a soft voice were telling me that this bit of colour was part of a wedding dress, and that other was a scrap of baldric worn when somebody was queen of the May, and that other — well, that was the old blue coat that had brass buttons on it, and that was brushed up for Henry Clay's funeral, and then hung in the pantry long after they buried the old man that wore it. But weave these old strands as one might, there was always the vital colour of the grandmother, and shift the events into any continuity that was possible, there was always sure

Digitized by Google

to be the old porch looming up and overlooking them. Great stalwart sons grew up and took after their full-blooded father. They romped with bare feet on those old boards and got their lessons on rainy days round that low window-sill. They took in the atmosphere of the mother just as they took in the smell of the hot roses that came round the southern corner of the porch. There would be one of them upon whom the mother had set her heart. He was to do as a man what she could not do as a woman; put into great heroic deeds the self-sacrifice and faith that need muscle and will, and over that particular member of her household she probably wept and prayed when no one saw her.

But, as the boys grew up, they all straggled off. The very freedom and brightness of the farm life grew monotonous. It offered no challenge to hot blood; so they had to weave their own mazes far away, and the sensitive one, upon whom the hopes had rested like white doves, fell into a youth's tangle, to escape which he ran away and enlisted, being afterward heard of somewhere on the Rio Grande, where he got a brass bullet in his lung. Griselle did not say so, but I understood well enough that at this crisis he began to smell the hot roses, and wished to be set down on that old porch. Nothing would do but he must speed that same bullet to the heart of his mother. They brought him home from Vera Cruz, and there was quite a cavalcade escorted the carriage up from the village, with a show of flags and a

Digitized by Google

scream of fifes. It drew up there at the steps. What do you suppose that mother cared for the flags and the fifes, when she saw that grizzly and dirty wreck lifted out with the deadly pallour on his cheeks? It was June, and the air was heavy with sweet reproaches. "Put me down here," he said, "on the porch for a while. I am going to die. Let me die out here."

Out of Griselle's scraps and patches there looms up another son who was speculative, and, I fear, dissolute. He must have made a great deal of money, in one way or another, and must have squandered it in the risky endeavour to make more. There were times when he was hard pinched by his own recklessness, and then he wrote to his mother, and she helped him out secretly, from the little savings of her own, but never questioning him. One summer he came up for a visit to the farm and brought a young wife with him. I see him sitting there under the vines, with the air of an exhibitor, and expecting all the family to admire his bride; treating them with the easy superiority of the young man who suddenly knows it all. I can see the mother trying to meet this young woman with maternal courtesy, and being regarded in return as very prim and fussy. There must have been many little stories current in the family after the young wife went away. How she asked one of the girls if somebody could not play the piano when she was going to bed — it was so awfully still — and couldn't they cut the bread a little thinner; and

Digitized by Google

how she had her husband's coffee brought up to him in the morning while he was in bed. She could not understand the old porch. What did people want to sit out there for — there was nobody going by.

In one of his after exploits this woman left him, and after that, it was said, he took to drink, and finally in extremity wrote to Griselle's father, and the letter was brought to the mother, as indeed everything was. What must she do but quietly pack her trunk and go without a word to New York, hunt up her offspring, and when nothing else would do, bring him back to the old porch?

In brief, the old house could not be touched reminiscently but there came out distinctly the outlines of the old mother who had held it together and brought back the renegades sooner or later with a sure attraction. She must have been the equitable sun that shone on the just and the unjust, and then one day, after many disappointments and hidden heartbreaks, she lay down calmly and died, and a strange desolation fell upon the place. The old house must have shown signs of dissolution, as if its *anima* had gone with her. The old porches, I dare say, echoed vacantly when she no longer sat at the low window. The morning-glories came as usual, and the humming-bird vibrated in the bloom, and the sun poured into the hall through the east door; but I judge that it all had a poignant irony for the old man, who must have resented such persistent continuance of peace and plenty when

Digitized by Google

his world had gone to pieces. He fell into an apathy of discouragement, and presently they laid him in the grave beside his wife.

I stood one day with Griselle at that little plot, and with great difficulty pushed away the wild blackberry vines to find the almost obliterated grave of that mother. Eternity is very jealous of the honours done to its favourites. Take good care of your warriors and champions, it seems to say — I will take care of mine in silence.

But, as I looked at the handsome maid, with her elbow on the old hand-rail, and the western sun glorifying her bronze hair as she leaned pensively on her hand, I could not help saying to myself — how absurd it is to speak of the perishing influences of a mother when they live and speak so vitally in the third generation. I was quite sure that the grandmother was looking at me out of those clear eyes with a waiting composure. Some kind of patience and nobility, I thought, biding their time.

How ridiculous was the Doctor's theory that a woman hugs and conceals her secrets, even from herself, now that I was in the presence of a woman who had no secrets. Something in the old porch, perhaps, that transmuted the Hotchkiss pedigree into a fairy tale. I have told you that it was often impossible there to tell where the flower ended and the wings began.

If that girl made me feel that I was a good deal of a void myself, can you blame me? Man is sent into this world unfinished. Nature seems

Digitized by Google

to say to him at the start: "You are incomplete. I have made that other part of you, but I do not remember where I put it. You will have to hunt for it."

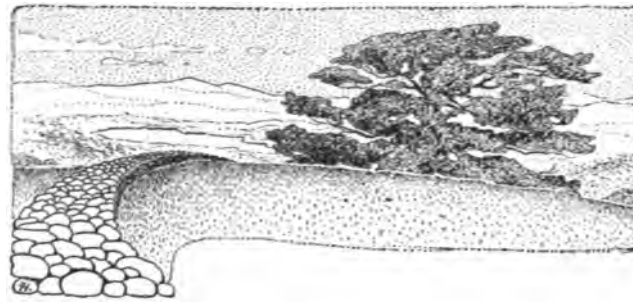
I have met many men who went about for years in this Psyche hunt, muttering to the women they met, "Where do you suppose the other half of me was put?"

And just as this fantasy went through my mind the sun disappeared, and a pleasant gloom fell round the Florentine maid. I heard the warning rap of a bird as if on the door of twilight. "It's a woodpecker," I said.

"No," said Griselle, getting up. "It's Uncle Gabe knocking the ashes out of his pipe. He is going to bed."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XII

A SEPTEMBER CHILL

I FOUND that as the season waned the migratory instinct in me asserted itself as it does in a bird. It was not difficult to extract contentment from July and August, but with September came certain vague longings and stirrings. The Hotchkiss woods are no more deserted in winter than in summer, and yet, with the first whiff of cool air, carrying a few yellow leaves, there came a restless desire to take wing. This is a characteristic of the social animal. He desires to go with the flock, and however seductive September may be to the eye, he is sure to hear far-away voices calling to him; even the rumble of trunks and the fluttering of departing wings at the watering places reach him. He cannot disguise from himself that the world is getting ready for comfortable winter quarters.

I did not get the newspapers in the Hotchkiss woods. It was part of my regimen not to get

Digitized by Google

them, but how well I knew what they were saying. There would be the lists of returning passengers on the incoming steamships; the bulletins of the theatre managers; I could almost hear the orchestras tuning up on those still nights; there would be house-hunting and much hand-shaking and putting in of coal and airing of salons. To be left out of these notes of preparation made me nervous. Besides, the joys of the woods would themselves be slipping away presently. The robins already wore an *au-revoir* look, and even the bluebirds would soon be seeking more comfortable quarters; the wire grass in front of my hovel was getting yellow in spots; the maples had hung out a few stray beacons of warning. Presently the cicada would dry up, and then how the still nights would gape. Gabe had piled up a few cords of hard wood on the westerly side of the hovel, because I told him I was going to face it out, and he had ominously hinted that it would be well to bank up the other side with a few sod. All this sounded chilly. "You could keep a barrel of potaters in that kitchen," he said, "if you are goin' to keep a fire there." I walked away and whistled a few bars of "La donna e mobile," that being the proper expression of my mood.

The more I looked at the prospect, the more cheerless it became. I was getting desperately moody. It was not possible for a man of my habits and associations to stick this thing out all winter! I was not a sportsman, a recluse, or a cowboy. My nature required that I should hear

Digitized by Google

some good music and try on a dress-coat once more; it even occurred to me that in order to preserve my interest in sublunary affairs I needed an occasional soft-shell crab or a piece of pompano. I kicked the yellow dog that day, to Charlie's amazement, and I must have spoken gruffly to Charlie, for I found him and the dog afterward sitting on a fallen tree-trunk, silently sympathizing with each other. I apologized to both of them, but it was a mere duty.

I watched the sun go down that evening, and I never before saw anything so consummately melancholy. It was luridly and mockingly fantastic, and was barred by the grim trunks of the trees, black and monolithic, that seemed to rise from a graveyard. A September sunset is probably the loneliest of all earthly spectacles. It is like Chopin's music, hiding tears with colour. Tears for what? God knows. If you are alone and in the mood, it will paint fathomless depths of pathos that you cannot sound, and rim its bulks of dun despair with ironical regrets.

Charlie and I fled from the twilight into the house and shut the door, and lit our kerosene lamp. Then we stumbled round in a haphazard way to get our supper. I made a strong pot of coffee, for which I had a sudden hankering, instead of tea, and desperately drank three or four cups of it, — black, — and when Charlie had mumbled his prayer and crawled into bed, I lit a cigar and paced up and down in the moonlight. It was a very ghostly affair, I thought. The

Digitized by Google

same melancholy that the sun had painted in oil was now washed in with water. I even felt chilly, although my thermometer said persistently that I was mistaken. I came in and smoked so many cigars that Charlie began to cough in his sleep, and then I threw the door and window open, and the night air struck me with a sharp shudder.

Finally I went to bed, and then set in an interminable tangle of dreams, crowded with human beings. I was with my old companions. We seemed to be going the rounds of well-remembered scenes of revelry. Theatres, concert saloons, men and women in endless processions of fantastic sportiveness, coming and going, with vast audiences, uneasy, oppressed, as if by a mysterious presence, and looking at me askance as if I had violated some inexorable law in coming back. I had been away for a thousand years, and the revelry all took on the melancholy of the sunset. But what, more than anything else, excited my astonishment in this hurrying phantasmagoria was the curious pulsing rhythm of it. It all expanded and shrank regularly, and everybody spoke and acted as if keeping time to the beat of a drum. Even the spectators vibrated with a horrible systole and diastole. It puzzled and pained me, and when I asked for an explanation, somebody told me that I was the cause of it all, and should not be permitted to go at large. Even this explanation came in strange pulses, as if one should speak in throbs. As I became aware that this rhythmic impulse proceeded from

Digitized by Google

myself, I rushed into the street, only to find everything beating and moving in the same measure, even the vehicles swelling and collapsing as if with the working of a great internal bellows; and the sound of far-away subterranean explosions seemed to set the increasing pace. Then suddenly the sense of an advancing catastrophe, of which all this rhythm was the mere footfall; a world-wide terror, inexplicable but certain, creeping like a fog over humanity. In the numb ecstasy of it I woke, and sitting up in bed, listened to the same drum beat and rhythm going on within me.

This was cruelly discouraging when I found out what it was. I got up and lit my lamp, determined to sleep no more on the edge of a precipice. I sat there in the gloom a thoroughly disheartened, if not a frightened man, saying to myself: "So this is the end of the Doctor's Nature cure. Here I am with this infernal disturbance breaking out again. What a jolly fool I have been making of myself — liable to die in that bed, and not a soul within a mile, and that child must get up some morning and discover me cold and stiff."

What would I not have given to hear an ambulance bell just for company, or to have grasped a telephone fraternally? But it was no use. I looked out into the night and listened. An owl far down in the woods was making sepulchral moans, and I thought if I had died and gone to Tartarus, it would not have been more spectral

Digitized by Google

than those low-down stars looking through the grim tree trunks and that unearthly chilly silence. "Nature herself plays the ghost at times," I said, and shut the door as if to keep her out. No sooner had I sat down again to brood than I became aware that the yellow dog was lying under Charlie's bed eying me wistfully. I had kicked her in the morning, and I could see that she bore no resentment. She was waiting anxiously to find out if I would kick her again or speak a kind word. It was really a matter of deep concern with her, and it only needed a look of passing friendliness in the corner of my eye, and everything would be forgotten. I must have shown some kind of compunction, for I heard her tail rap inquiringly.

"Come here, you yellow brute," I said. "There isn't anybody else to talk to. Oh, wag your tail. There's no reason in the world why you should not enjoy yourself to the top of your bent. You're not a man. Yes, I know, I acted more like a brute this morning than you possibly could, but you must make some allowance for a human being who hasn't anything to wag. There, that's all right — don't jump on me; you're a good dog, and there's no need of being so demonstrative, and everything is understood between us. I could tell you a lot of handsome things that man has said about dogs. You are the only domestic brute that isn't his slave and is content to be his worshipper. Don't lick my hand either. I understand you perfectly. Don't try so hard to express yourself. You want to know what's the matter

Digitized by Google

with me. Be quiet and I will tell you. I am sick. I came up here to do as you do and sleep it off in the sun; but it didn't work worth a cent, because I'm only a man, and not a fortunate dog like you. Hist, what do you want to bark for? Don't you know Charlie is asleep? I'll bounce you if you don't stop. You can just wag your tail and talk, can't you, quietly? What time do you suppose it is? Wait till I look at my watch. It must be nearly morning. Heavens, it's only half-past three. What can we do for three hours? The sun will not be up till six. I'll tell you, let's light that wood fire. A wood fire is company. Come on, there's some light wood in the kitchen, and I feel chilly."

I might as well put down that dog's reply, if for no other reason than that it is a true dog's reply, and not man's, which dog talk is so apt to be. This is what he said, exactly: "I can't make out what it is you propose to do, but I understand in a general way that you are going to do something, and I'm with you whatever it is. Let's make as much hullabaloo about it as we can."

I have learned that a dog apprehends a man's meaning very much as a man apprehends the meaning of a symphony. It is purely a matter of tones and not of articulations. He seizes upon your moods, not upon your ideas, with the marvellous generalizing capacity of a sympathetic ear. He responds to the allegros and andantes, appropriates the rhythms without consciousness, and keeps time to the feelings as they slip and

Digitized by Google

merge. Man must be a continual Beethoven to a dog, uttering mystic strophes that he cannot analyze. A dog is thus superior to a man in that he is always saved from being a critic.

From three o'clock in the morning till sunrise is the time when invalids die. It is the lowest point of the great ebb. The ooze of life lies stark and forbidding, and nothing stirs in it. Then it is that time lags, especially if you are alone. I thought of all the lonely vigils with death hovering around the near-by bed, and that being rather gruesome, I tried to fill up the dismal gap with an air of fussiness. I could at least imitate some of the motions of life. I went out into the kitchen to look for kindling, and as I pulled at the woodpile, the yellow dog jumped to the conclusion that I was looking for rats, and I had to choke him kindly to prevent Charlie from waking up and contemplating our nocturnal idiocy. I got down on my hands and knees and blew at the sticks and paper I had piled in the fireplace, and presently a lazy spiral of smoke began to curl up the chimney. Even that looked companionable. But no sooner had the enlivening conflagration set in than an unexpected rumpus broke out. The old chimney was alive. There was a beating of wings, much peeping and scratching, and down came a brood of swallows, some of them flirting the firebrands in all directions, and others circling round the room with twittering alarm, knocking down all the small articles and upsetting the lamp, as if chaos had broken loose with a brood of night imps, in

Digitized by Google

all of which the yellow dog, with the exuberance of misdirection, in an animal that has no regular conduits for her emotions, began to make the place ring with barking. I understood perfectly well every phrase of her declamation. "Oh, say, master, I knew that you were up to something, but I never dreamed it was as lively as this! Yap, yap, yap. It's as good as if rats had wings." And presently, as I got the lamp lit, and burned my fingers trying to pull one of the infernal imps out of the ashes, and was dancing round the room blowing my hands, with the dog at my heels, shouting, "Go it, this is something like life," I saw Charlie sitting up in bed, rubbing his fists into his eyes to get the smoke out, and trying to say with all the features he had, "What's broke loose?"

When this episode had quieted down, I looked at my watch. It was only four o'clock. I sat down in a chair and laughed hysterically like a woman, and there stood that expectant yellow dog, saying as plainly as an oscillating spinal system could say: "Now, that *was* fine. What next?"

I had never before in my life waited for the morning. Many persons, I dare say, have waited for it every night of their lives. But I did not think of that, nor of the other fact that to many of them it never came.

By and by the flame of the lamp began to grow greenishly dull, and a gray, ghostly light stole in by degrees. I heard the breath of dawn rustling the leaves. It was like the footsteps of a returning friend — why not say an airy herald? Griselle

Digitized by Google

herself would be coming across the fields presently, bringing the sunrise with her. By Jove, "I'd walk over and meet her." But when I looked into the little mirror I changed my mind, and calling the dog, I went down to the pool and had an early bath. By this and other devices I managed to fill in the time until I saw the muslin skirt and the Florentine hat glancing in the perspective, and, as I live, the Doctor was with her, and was carrying her milk-pail. He had come up the night before and stopped at the Hotchkiss house. He looked me all over with a quick glance, and said: —

"What have you been doing? You look as melancholy as if you had been editing a comic paper."

As Griselle slipped into the house, I told him.

"It's anxiety. I've got to move to-day. Going to the city. Nature cure no good. Theory don't work. Nature played out. Had an attack. Just where I was when I started. If I must shuffle off, I propose to do it where my last moments will be cheered with the strains of a hand-organ, and they can put me up in ice for keeps."

He did not pay much attention to my words. He was reading my condition and let me run on.

"Couldn't possibly stick it out here all winter. In fact, I've come to the conclusion that I would rather go to the city and die than stay here and live."

"All right," he said; "that's easy. Did you make up your mind since last night?"

Digitized by Google

"Yes — had a second warning."

Just then Griselle came to the door with the coffee-pot in her hand.

"Why, whatever have you done with the coffee? The pot is more than half full of grounds."

"Oh, I made coffee for supper last night," I said carelessly.

"Let me look at it," said the Doctor.

He took the coffee-pot and looked into it. "Must have used about a pound, didn't you?"

"I suppose so — that's about the usual amount, isn't it?"

"And drank the whole of it, of course?"

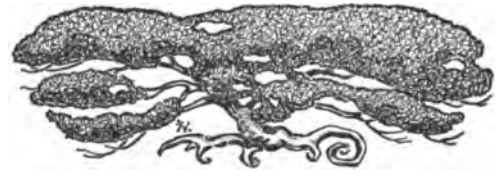
"Certainly."

He looked at me a moment rather benignantly, and then he said: —

"Well, let's go in and get our breakfast, and we'll talk it over afterward. Griselle has got some quail to broil, and Gabe has brought over a basket of cantaloupes that will make you more comfortable. Then you can pack up and go to the city. I'm going to stay a week or two."

"What — you? Why, I want your advice."

"Then you'll have to stay here to get it."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XIII

MATURE TRUANTS

THE next day he laughed me out of my determination to abandon the woods and go to the city. I could defy his advice, but I could not withstand his laughter. He warned me with considerable mirthfulness, which I thought superfluous, against what he called mercurial moods — city vestiges. Men who never know when the east wind blows and do not care a fig how much humidity is in the atmosphere, were the best men for practical purposes. Altogether he had a good deal of jolly contempt for what he called "the impertinent valetudinarian sensibilities." The man who never knew that he had a stomach, a heart, or even a brain, was the man for him, for he came the nearest to Nature's ideal. A man who would drink three cups of black coffee, smoke six cigars, and then turn into bed would be very apt to construct a vast and dangerous theory of heart disease before

Digitized by Google

morning, and ought to be kept on milk and apples.

Then I got a very edifying lecture on heart disease, that I cannot remember, for it was studded all over with technical names that stood out like the brass nails on a hair trunk, but it left a rather satisfactory impression on my mind that the heart was a gay deceiver and played more pranks with a man than any other organ, if it once succeeded in attracting attention to itself. The only way to treat it was with respectful disdain as not belonging to one's conscious set.

The Doctor was one of those physicians who radiate health instead of prescribing it. He said once that he got his diploma from Nature, and had been forty years matriculating. But he had the document of his human Alma Mater framed and hung up in his study, all the same, and I could afford to take his hyperboles with good humour, as when he said that six out of ten sick men would acquire health if they could only be restored to primitive ignorance; they knew too much to be normal.

Absurd as all this was, it nevertheless had a reviving effect that was inscrutable, like a smell of terebinth. The Doctor exuded balm of Gilead in his talk. It was always an exaggerated and lusty kind of assertion that struck you like the afflatus of the pine woods when the west wind blows. It was as if he had more health himself than he knew what to do with, and so shed it in his conversation.

Digitized by Google

"I'll tell you what we'll do," he said to me one evening. "We'll take our sticks and get out of the beaten track."

"Where shall we go?" I asked.

"Ah, that's it. We will just go like derelicts. There shall be no goal and no purpose and no provision, and then the way will be full of surprises. We shall never know where we are or what the morrow will bring forth. We will divest ourselves of all intent, and fill ourselves with the delight of a road that leads nowhere. Did you ever try that experiment?"

"I never did, at least, since I played truant."

"Happy word — truant. Let us be truants for a few days; run away from our arrogant volitions and let the great tides of unconcern swing us with their ebb and flow. It will be evangelical."

"Be what?"

"Evangelical."

"It might be jolly, but I never associated jollity with an evangel."

"That's because you are thinking of it theologically, and I am speaking of it etymologically; simply good news, without telegraph-wires. Something like the dew, always encompassing, but only obvious when you are cool enough to condense it. I cannot imagine anything so evangelical as to strip one's self down to a purposeless passivity and issue a general invitation to the nature of things to say what it has to say in its own way. Did it ever occur to you that the race

Digitized by Google

would have destroyed itself long ago if there had not been an iron hand which crushed down its impertinence once every twenty-four hours and said: 'Nothingness, if you please, for seven hours; say your prayers and shut your eyes in helplessness, and I will try and repair damages'?"

I must have laughed, not disrespectfully, but with that kind of gleeful surprise that one experiences when he sees a Scripture quotation in a yellow journal, for he said: —

"It sounds fanciful to you. Let me tell you that in my profession I have many a time come face to face with the Benign Universal doing for man what his individualism could not do for itself. Just as soon as his self-determination was suspended entirely, some kind of protective arm seemed to wind itself around him. You never saw a somnambulist walk on the dizzy edge of a precipice, did you?"

"I congratulate my nerves that I never did."

"Well, I did. If we had recalled her to consciousness, she would have broken her neck. You have probably seen a drunken man do things that would have killed a sober man."

"True; but I never felt that in the nature of things one was safer when intoxicated than when sober."

"It wasn't necessary to draw any such conclusion. Because Nature takes pity on a drunken man, you needn't imitate him. It is only necessary to perceive that back of the free and defiant agent is another which cannot make itself operative

Digitized by Google

unless the subject is passively obedient. There is a profound mystery of benignity in the drugs that kill, when handled by the practitioner, for in his hands they kill the volition without killing the patient."

"Doctor, if I had a tail I would wag it. The ideal man is obviously an automaton."

"He ought to be, not statically, like a codfish, but alternately, like a prophet, who bows his head at times and is content to be played upon.

"It has always been the religious way of acknowledging the Not Me. It might also be the vital way. Did it ever occur to you that all the master volitions of the world that history has made us acquainted with utterly failed to accomplish what they set out to do? Take Charlemagne, Bonaparte, Luther, Wesley, as examples. They had one purpose. Events had another, and they were swept along to a goal they never saw. On the other hand, those other geniuses, Phidias, Shakspere, St. Paul, who lost themselves in their work, lived forever in it. Themselves from God they could not free. Fancy Shakspere giving such an exposition of 'The Tempest' as Poe did of 'The Bells,' or explaining how he formed his style, as our amiable friend Stevenson has done. When Shakspere, or Dante, or Isaiah executed a *chef d'œuvre*, he did not explain it intellectually and call himself 'big Injun.' Those old fellows rubbed their eyes with a glad surprise and sang psalms: 'I will show forth all Thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in Thee.' So

Digitized by Google

does art, to use the words of an eloquent Frenchman, 'continue the dream of God.'"

After this rhapsody the Doctor got up and played with the yellow dog a moment, as if there might be some brute confirmation of what he said in tale-wagging and spontaneous irrelevancy. As I said nothing, he came back to me gustily.

"You'll pardon me, old chap, for stuffing a conversation with a lecture. Forget all about it and let's play truant. I have an idea it will put you on your spiritual legs, so to speak. We do not need a formal introduction to the unpredicable and eternal. All we have to do is to snub ourselves. At all events we can imitate the laxity of sleep for a while. There's recuperation in it. I've tried it."

One morning we started off early, roughly but properly "togged," without knowing where we were going. I confess that there was a boyish zest in the uncertainty and freedom of it. We were unfamiliar with the country except in the immediate neighbourhood of the farm, and we had looked at no map and asked no questions. Charlie was left in the care of Griselle, with the puzzling understanding that we did not know when we should be back. The moment we were out of sight of the house, the Doctor asked me if I felt any of the true inwardness of being a tramp. I told him I thought I had some faint premonitions of it. "Wait," he said, "till we have to beg our dinner, and they ask us to saw wood."

How exhilarating that walk was! There are

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

...s art, to ... words of an eloquent French-
..., '... dream of God.'"

... rhapsody the Doctor got up and
... slowly a moment, as if there
... confirmation of what he said
... spontaneous irrelevancy. As
... he came back to me gustily.

... on me, old chap, for stuffing a
... with a lecture. Forget all about it
... truant. I have an idea it will put
... spiritual legs, so to speak. We do
... formal introduction to the unpredica-
... ternal. All we have to do is to snub
... At all events we can imitate the la...
... for a while. There's recuperation in ...
... it."

... orning we started off early, roughly but
... "toward," without knowing where we
... confess that there was a boyish
... exhilaration, and freedom of it. We
... unfurled ... on the country except in the
... mediate ... encampment of the farm, and we
... looked ... to map and asked no questions.
... Charlie was left in the care of Griselle, with the
... understanding that we did not know
... when we should be back. The moment we were
... out of the house, the Doctor asked me if
... the true inwardness of being a tramp.
... I thought I had some faint premoni-
... "Wait," he said, "till we have to
... ..., and they ask us to saw wood."
... long that walk was! There are

Digitized by Google



ALL THAT WAS SEEN OF HUMAN BEINGS FOR SEVERAL MILES WERE THE LABOURERS STACKING THE CORN IN THE FIELDS, AND THEY GAVE NO HEED TO US.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

times when the body exults in motion. The human machine springs to its work with wings, and all the forces of the man exert a stimulating pressure to the square inch. It is apt to be on such an morning as was that in September, with a bright sun shining, white clouds sailing over a deep blue sky, with a fresh westerly breeze, and the roads yet damp with the late rain; something, too, in the companionship, as if kindred spirits were keeping step, or, better still, had taken hold of hands, as children do when they romp. The air was heavy with the fragrance of the wild-grape vines, and the fields were deliciously russet — just that melting gradation of sienna and tawny smears, running into a dull Naples yellow, that you see on a finely baked custard — and fringed with early goldenrod. The old road ran between stone walls, only visible here and there through the flaming blackberry vines, but backed up with great hedgerows, out of which the wild-cherry trees and the elderberry, heavy with their burdens, thrust themselves into view along with the scrawny crab-apples. All that was seen of human beings for several miles were the labourers stacking the corn in the fields, and they gave no heed to us. Once we passed a farm wagon heavily loaded with great yellow pumpkins, and we left it far behind creaking its way lazily. Now and then a house by the roadside seemingly deserted, but oftener the roofs of old-fashioned homesteads sticking out of the vistas at a safe distance from the highway, making themselves known as domes-

Digitized by Google

tic centres by the cry of the pea-hens or the bark of a dog, and generally having an index-finger stuck up in the shape of a well-sweep.

Once we came upon a printed warning: "No trespassing on these grounds, under penalty of the law. Beware of the dogs." That stopped us. I think it jarred a little on the general sense of looseness and laziness. The Doctor looked at me inquiringly, and I undertook to explain: —

"Modern improvements," I said; "lawns, coverts, perhaps a preserve."

The Doctor climbed up on the fence and examined the sign. "It has been painted about ten years, I should judge," he said. "Suppose we investigate it."

"I am with you," I said. "I can take care of one dog if you will look out for the other."

We climbed over the fence, went through the trees and underbrush, and came out on a road that had once been gravelled. It brought us to a house, mansion-like in proportions, with the shutters tight and the doors boarded up. In front stood an old broken vase, with vestiges of a fountain and some broken pieces of plaster that may have been a statue. We sat down and surveyed the melancholy pile.

"The country is dotted with them every ten miles from Penobscot to the Golden Gate," said the Doctor. "I'll warrant that some old sea-captain who gave his life to battling with the ocean comforted himself up to the time of his dotage with retirement on a farm. Doubtless he was a

Digitized by Google

whaling master and thought Nantucket was conventional. He came here and tried to shiver timbers and pipe all the affections on deck, after the affections had died of the scurvy. Then the loneliness of it killed him, and none of his heirs have had the decency to take that sign down."

Then he chuckled, as he always did, to take the edge off an absurdity.

"Perhaps," I ventured to remark, "if we could get at the heart of these old farmers who never die, we should find that they had a similar intention, to end their days on a whaler."

"No," said the Doctor, "it will not work both ways. What you have called the homing instinct is universal, but the migratory instinct is not. The trouble with the homing instinct is, with most men, that it is unaccompanied by a homing capacity. It is so with all of us. As we grow old, the desire to return is irresistible, but the capacity to return is gone. I say, old fellow, if you want to do the prodigal-son business, don't wait until you are old. What do you suppose was the age of that young man in the Bible story?"

"Judging from his recklessness, I should say he was about sixty-two."

The Doctor sat down on the edge of the fountain. "By the way," he said, "I wonder how that old germ story would have survived if it had been told realistically and not dramatically."

"Dramatically?"

"Certainly. Notice how it falls, away back

Digitized by Google

there, into five acts. You can put the descriptive titles to each act just as the dramatists do. There is the first act, the Happy Family; second act, the Estrangement and Temptation; third act, the Suffering and Remorse; fourth act, the Return; fifth act, the Merrymaking. There is a shadow flits over it in the brother's envy, and then all ends happily. Out of this fecund little vesicle of a tale, how many thousands of the world's legends have been wrought without ever improving on the subtle simplicity of the original, or broadening the ethical and romantic ground plan of a return. The whole fabric of the people's legendary fiction, from the wandering of Ulysses to the waking of Rip Van Winkle, seems to have been woven upon the postulate of a return, and when the imaginations of men tried to fashion the most dreadful of possibilities, they invented the Wandering Jew, for whom there was no return. I wonder how Zola or Bourget would have written the story of the prodigal. What penetration into the customs and manners and hereditary fatalism of the riotous livers; what accurate and thrilling photographs of the swine; how pathetic the futile attempts of the Prodigal to escape from the seductive determinism of husks, and how admirably he would have failed to arrive at the proper moment, when the father was waiting for him, because he had blown his brains out or cut his throat with a potsherd on the way. *Allons*, brother, I prefer the highway."

We descended slowly into a valley, which grew

Digitized by Google

shadowy and wet, and there was the traditional rustic bridge across a narrow stream. The Doctor looked at his watch. "How far," he asked, "do you suppose we have come?"

I thought five miles. He calculated eight. It was noon. We leaned against the old hand-rail and looked at each other.

"Doctor," said I, "I acknowledge the prodigal feeling — it is located mainly in my stomach."

He pointed down the stream to a flat rock, very mossy and canopied by a marsh poplar. "Let us repair," he said, "to yon umbrageous spot. I have bread and butter with home-cured ham interpolated, not to mention two hard-boiled eggs, prepared by the dainty fingers of the girl we have left behind. I will promise you not to lecture."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XIV

THE BAPTISM OF DIRT

SEPTEMBER sets her quiet banquets occasionally, and, like Hamlet, we eat the air, promise-crammed. There are breakfasts of sunrise and long hours of aerial lunch, when the atmosphere is golden with invisible fruit, and all one can do is to feed the senses. Then it is that the old, worn earth is very beautiful, as she sits with her hands crossed in her bounteous lap. With her labour all finished, one might say that she crooned softly on a royal death-bed. It is at this rare interval of fruition and expectancy that the poor devils lock their studio doors and steal away to the woods and mountains to lay in inspiration after society has fled. September to them is a rustic sweetheart, who welcomes them with fruity breath and large calm eyes of blue. Then it is that they renew their youth, looking for the sleeping princess, and become princes themselves in fairy solitudes.

Digitized by Google

No one but the artist knows how eloquently still and prophetic September is. It is her rest that floods him with inscrutable delight, and coaxes out of him the longings and the hopes that enter into and unite with the great inarticulate psalm. I say "hopes" deliberately; and yet faith would be a better word, for the æsthetic nature gets mildly and religiously intoxicated: —

"His faith is fast
That all the loveliness he'd sing
Is made to bear the mortal blast
And blossom in a better spring."

It is only the artist who can see the possible sunrise in the actual sunset.

In the Doctor's office in the city there is hung upon his wall one Scripture motto. I have often looked at it wonderingly, asking myself what it meant, and how it came to be there. This is what it says: —

"For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel. In returning and in rest shall ye be saved. In quietness and confidence shall be your strength, and ye would not."

One day I was waiting there with an artist friend, who was badly run down, and needed advice. We expected the Doctor to come in at any moment. My friend stood looking at the text, musingly.

"Well," I asked, "what do you make of it?"

He looked at me dreamily, and said: —

Digitized by Google

"I don't know why, but it put me in mind of a day in September. I suppose those old prophets lived in a kind of autumn of the soul. Did you never have a thought rustle like the dead leaves?"

The Doctor and I sat down on a sloping rock, eating bread and butter. Jack Horner was a pessimist compared with us. To be able to eat bread and butter at all was one of the victories of the natural over the artificial man, but to eat it voraciously and want more seemed to strike the Doctor as a moral victory. There was only one higher plane, he thought, for me, and it was to be able to eat mush and milk with joy and thankfulness.

The beautiful mountain stream ran swirlingly but softly in front of us, weaving and melting into confluent and vanishing curves, and making an intoxicating chromotype of colour, as it swept in under the overhanging shadows and out again into the radiant sunlight, murmuring very softly as if subdued to the season. Here and there a cardinal-flower, that leaned over to look at itself out of its own green and tangled cloister, shot a spark of colour downward, and against a gnarled bank the water spun silver tissues over the old gold of the sand. Somewhere out of sight, we could hear the muffled drum-beat of a little cascade pounding against the wet rock. That was all. It was like an oboe uncertainly played. We both listened. "Does the stillness oppress you with its melancholy?" asked the Doctor.

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

[illegible] know why, but it put [illegible] in mind [illegible] September. I suppose [illegible] of [illegible] a kind of [illegible] soul. [illegible] have a thought [illegible] the

[illegible] I sat down on a [illegible] to [illegible] and butter. Jack [illegible] was [illegible] shared with us. To see a [illegible] eat [illegible] was one of the vices [illegible] of [illegible] the artificial man, but to eat it [illegible] and want more seemed to strike the [illegible] moral victory. There was only one [illegible] one, he thought, for me, and it was to be [illegible] much and milk with joy and thank-

[illegible] beautiful mountain stream ran swirlingly [illegible] in front of us, weaving and melting into [illegible] and vanishing curves, and making an [illegible] shifting chrome type of colour, as it swept in [illegible] the ever-changing shadows and out again [illegible] into sunlight, murmuring very softly [illegible] to the season. Here and there a [illegible] boat leaned over to look at itself [illegible] in the green and tangled cloister, shot [illegible] deeper downward, and against a gnarled [illegible] root wove silver tissues over the old [illegible] sand. Somewhere out of sight, we [illegible] muffled drum-beat of a little cas- [illegible] against the wet rock. That was all. [illegible] an oboe uncertainly played. We [illegible]. "Does the stillness oppress you [illegible] melancholy?" asked the Doctor.

Digitized by Google



THE BEAUTIFUL MOUNTAIN STREAM SWIRLINGLY.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

I was not at all sure. There was something pensive in it, I thought. It was as if Nature were holding her breath. "I never could understand," I said, "why the banquet of the year should be tinged with solemnity."

"I can only offer a suggestion," remarked the Doctor. "All the other months of the season are obtrusive and jocund with incessant preparation. July and August burst into insistence with the pressure of life. Everything, from the tiniest spark of animation to the highest form of animal beauty and instinct, made those summer months a workshop. They hammered, and wove, and spun, and built, and multiplied, and rounded it all up completely in perfect obedience, singing, and chirping, and warbling, and flashing to get it all done. They have finished the work and gone away. It is impossible for a man to come face to face with this glad consummation and rest without feeling some kind of self-reproach. There is something that he has not finished. A mocking voice tells him he never will. That is what Pascal meant when he said that the superiority of a man to a tree is that the tree does not know that it is miserable, and Emerson somewhere says that man would not love Nature so childishly if he were good."

Then the Doctor pulled up suddenly, as he always did when he found himself getting preachy, and said: "There is a sawmill a mile or two up this stream. There may be hospitality and bread and milk there."

Digitized by Google

"How do you know?" I asked; "you never were here before."

"True," he replied, "but there is sawdust in the water, and the bank is wet a foot or two higher than the stream, as if somebody opened his flume occasionally."

The road, after passing over the little river on the bridge, turned at a sharp bend and ran parallel with the banks for some distance, under the grateful shade of chestnuts and elms, the openings in which afforded us continual glimpses of the water, here broken into foamy hurries and there spread out in dark pools. Not a bird sang in the branches. The only vestiges of summer life that we encountered for a mile or two were some crows caucusing in a dead tree that looked, against the blue sky, like a bunch of antlers, and now and then we met with the little white butterflies that flutter in couples and look like wayward petunias blown about by imperceptible winds. We were winding through the heart of real rusticity. Here and there we saw the bent labourers at work digging potatoes. Looked at from the distance, they presented all the aspects of ignoble drudgery, grubbing for what at best must be a scanty living. As the sun approached the horizon, and we began to wonder where we should put up for the night, I suggested that we had better interview some of these field hands as to our whereabouts, and at last we crawled over a stone fence and made our way through stubble and furrows, and past long rows of bagged po-

Digitized by Google

tatoes, to a distant group, consisting of two men and a woman, who were digging away mechanically.

"Good day, friends," said the Doctor, breezily; "we are strangers and have lost our way."

One of the men leaned on his hoe and looked us over. The others went on with their work.

"Where do you want to go?" the man asked.

"Anywhere, my friend, so that we can get a supper and a night's lodging. We are on a bit of a jaunt for our health and have lost our bearings." The Doctor pulled out a very handsome watch and looked at it. "It's a quarter of five," he said. "Perhaps you can direct us so that we can reach the nearest stopping-place before night."

I could not very well suppress a feeling of pity as the man wiped the sweat from his face with a cotton handkerchief and regarded us with a dull astonishment. He must have been sixty years old. His hard sinewy hands were like tangled roots, his face was tanned to a mahogany colour, so that the white hairs on it looked grizzly. He wore an old torn felt hat, and he took it off and fanned himself as he said: —

"Wanderin' around loose, hey? Which way was you pointin'?"

The Doctor looked at me, and we both laughed. It would not do to tell this pragmatic rustic that we had abandoned all definite intentions.

"We were examining the country," said the Doctor, with magnificent indefiniteness. "Isn't there a mill somewheres about?"

Digitized by Google

"Only a sawmill. Runnin' fire-wood now. Jedge Dutcher's farm's about three miles west — there's nothin' between him an' me 'cept the sawmill. Milligan's Corner's two miles beyond."

"Do you feel able to do five miles more?" asked the undiminished Doctor.

At this the young woman spoke up. "Why don't you ask the gentlemen to stop with us, Dad — that's what they're fishin' for. We can spare 'em some grub."

"The team'll be along in a minute or two," said the old man. "If you've a mind to go back with us, we can feed yer."

Then the three of them fell to digging again without any further reference to us. The Doctor picked up one of the potatoes. It was as big as his two fists. While we were making complimentary remarks that did not call for any interruption of the work, a farm wagon, drawn by two lusty horses and driven by a boy, came up. This was the signal to stop, and immediately the labourers seemed to recover their humanity. The girl shook the soil off her heavy skirt, threw her hoe into the wagon, and entered at once into conversation with us, while the men lifted a few of the filled bags into the wagon. She was a slim, but nervy damsel, with a very red face, and a pair of bright eyes. She stepped over the furrows with a vigorous and easy grace that surprised me.

"It's pretty hard work on a woman," she said; "but our hired man had his two fingers cut off in

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

A JOURNEY TO NATURE

Digitized by Google



WE DREW UP AT A LONG, LOW HOUSE AMONG THE TREES, VERY ANCESTRAL, I THOUGHT, FOR PEASANTS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

the mill, and, being short-handed, I had to turn in with the rest. It's the biggest crop we ever had, and the old man wanted to get it in."

"It's a magnificent crop of potatoes," said the Doctor, with the easy air of an expert. "What's it worth?"

"Well, if the old man don't realize five hundred on it, he'll be sick at Christmas. It won't run as good as that more'n once in five years. Now, if you'll pile into that wagon, we'll take you with us."

We drew up at a long, low house hidden away in locust trees, very ancestral, I thought, for peasants. A shaft of ruddy light shot into the road from the summer kitchen, where a motherly dame in a white apron stood in the doorway with her hand over her eyes, trying to make out what had arrived in the wagon, a curiosity that suddenly broke out in a shrill call, "Mercy on me, Lize, who you got there?"

"All right, mommy," said Lize. "I'll be there in a minute. Now, then, I suppose you want to wrench the dirt off. I'll show you the basin."

How deliciously cool and vitalizing that well water was. I put my head down into it, and it had a fine magnetism in it. It was not long before Lize came out on the porch where we were waiting for her. She was attired in a clean muslin dress with a baby waist. She had evidently "wrenched" herself expeditiously and thoroughly, and she came out, as the Doctor said, like a silk-

Digitized by Google

worm. Presently we went in to supper with the warning from Lize that we would have to take what we could get. There was something inexpressibly bright and inviting about the homeliness of that supper table, with its kerosene lamp and blue shade, its mug of marigolds, its spotless white cloth, and a certain simple bounty in the great dish of steaming biscuit and superb roll of sweet butter, to say nothing of the cold meat and potatoes and the homely earthen teapot. The old man held up his gnarled hands and mumbled some hardly articulate words of thanks, and we fell to as readily and easily as if we were in a Bedouin tent and a kid had been killed for us.

I thought I detected in the curiosity of our hosts a latent pity for persons who came from the city, which was to them a place where men took their lives in their hands and were always in danger of jumping off the Brooklyn Bridge from excess of excitement or to escape from the noise. The old lady thought it must be awfully tedious to be always on the hop, skip, and jump for fear of being crushed by an electric car. She said she always felt when she was in a crowd as if she had the pleurisy coming on again, and there wasn't a scrap of boneset in the county. Broadway to her was like a bull-yard with a fence down, and the old lady said this with a calm superiority as if she were looking down on us through her spectacles from some primitive Elysium.

I really felt as if the Doctor's Scripture motto

Digitized by Google

had been woven out of drudgery into the fine autumnal lines of her benign old face.

I have to confess that in coming upon this bit of picturesque slavishness I regarded it at first as an artist might, thinking it good enough to paint, but not good enough to emulate. It was impossible for my artificial daintiness to avoid feeling for it a slight pity of superiority, which was of course only an evidence that I knew nothing whatever about it. I had grown into that sort of hypersensitiveness which calls soil "dirt," and regards physical labour in the furrow as something which every self-respecting American has outgrown by three generations. I'm afraid that if my conclusions at the time had been brought to light, they would have been found to be, that superior intellects never delved, only aspired; that American enterprise did not bother about making dirt fat with an hundred fold, but washed and dressed itself and stood round to intercept with gloved hands some of the money that passed from the consumer to the producer. I dare say that, at first contact with this group, I was Mohammedan enough in my sensibilities to believe that a girl in a tow frock could by no possibility become a Peri. All this is contemptibly un-American by the record, and I am frankly ashamed of it now. But it needed just such a clod-hopping Peri to wipe the scales from my eyes with the end of her tow frock.

That she "wrenched" herself in a pail of spring water, or had a scented bath in some upper grotto of her own, I do not know, but she shed her clod-

Digitized by Google

hopper integuments like a columbine, for they were, after all, only an improvisation, and she came out in a baby waist of muslin with short sleeves, and fluttered a little guidon of ribbon in her rich molasses-coloured hair, that made her look, upon my word, like one of those late morning-glories on Gabe's porch.

I could not help thinking as I watched her preside at that tea-table — that was what she called it — with an innate and facile self-possession, and saw with what unconscious chivalry the two men treated her, how easily she would effect the transformation to a fine lady when some well-to-do fellow pulled her up by the roots from her furrow and planted her in his conservatory. I had seen this marvellous plasticity of the uncut American diamond in Paris and in London. How quick she would cease to say "wrench" and "Pop" and take to saying, "Bless my soul, governor." Not a suspicion of the furrow in two years, not even the freckles. If you destroy that possibility, you nip the American progress in the bud.

Of course she was not of as fine a mettle as Griselle; I hope I have made it tolerably clear before this, that few girls could be. But there was about her a certain honest, easy, transparent dignity, with contentment that refreshed. She was not ashamed of potatoes. That fact wrung from me a silent tribute before I knew it. She showed us her cottage piano and the inevitable sewing-machine in the little parlour, not as one shows furniture, but as one shows an acquirement, for

Digitized by Google

she said as she pointed to one, "potatoes," and as she pointed to the other, "lima beans." There was a surveyor's level in the corner of the room, and seeing us regard it with surprise, she said: "Oh, that's Ike's — he's getting the levels of the south fields, so as to run the water from the cold spring into the house." Ike had been to the seminary at some time in his life.

There was an hour or two of conversation on the grass-plot after supper, where the old man smoked his clay pipe regularly. He would no more dare to smoke it in that homely dining room than he would dare to go to bed with his boots on. Then we were shown to a chamber, the peasant girl holding the kerosene lamp for us like that colossal girl in our harbour, and saying: "Pleasant dreams, gents. I'll rap on your door at six o'clock if you're not up;" and we both heard her starched skirts rustle down the stairs. We went immediately to bed between sheets that smelled of sweet balsam, and if the Doctor snored I did not notice it. I was awakened by the rumble of the wagon, and saw in the early mists the two men going to the potato-field, one of them whistling cheerily, his notes coming back to me like a skylark's, long after he was out of sight.

At the breakfast table we had an opportunity of conversing more leisurely with the Peri of the Soil. She poured our coffee — very good coffee it was, with fresh cream in it — and she served us with fresh eggs and home-cured bacon and hot corn-meal muffins, and, placing a receptacle of

Digitized by Google

sewing material beside the coffee-pot, she pulled up a chair and employed her time in fitting a new neck-band on a hickory shirt, while we ate.

"I should suppose," said the Doctor, "that even so charming a home as this would sometimes be a little lonesome to you."

"Lonesome" evidently had a different meaning for her. She repeated the word inquiringly, as if it had never occurred to her before. "I guess people don't get lonesome if they have enough to do," she said, and the Doctor smiled significantly at me, as if he wanted to insert an aside to the effect that digging potatoes does not ruin horse sense. Then she added, "I suppose anybody could find lonesomeness if he had time to wander around looking for it. I should think you would have found it on the road."

"Yes, but we had had too much of the other thing and were trying to get away from it. I suppose it's very different with you."

"Yes," she said, "I guess it is. What were you looking for on the road?"

At that the Doctor guffawed outright. "What was it we were looking for?" he asked me, as if he needed prompting, and the girl, seeing there was some hesitancy, tried to help us out. "You wasn't lookin' for work, was you?"

"No," replied the Doctor, "not exactly. We were both of us a little overworked, and we were looking for rest and a change. Everybody needs them at times. I dare say now, even you would like a change sometimes."

Digitized by Google

She let the hickory shirt drop in her lap and looked into vacancy a moment, as if she had seen a phantom temptation pass by.

"There's a good many stragglers stop here in the course of the year," she said, "but they are never women."

The Doctor instantly corroborated this idea. "I understand," he said. "Women can be almost everything that men can be, except tramps. But we are not tramps."

"No, you don't talk like tramps. I have been tryin' to make out what you are."

"Neighbours," I ventured. "We are staying at the Hotchkiss farm for a while."

"Oh, is that so — Gabe Hotchkiss's. It ain't so lonesome there, I guess."

"It's about the same kind of a farm as this. They raise the same kind of stuff."

"We never could raise city boarders," she said rather shyly. "I heard Gabe would be sellin' the place. I suppose his niece will be gettin' married. She's had plenty of chances."

As this verged upon gossip, and we were not disposed to discuss our friends, the breakfast came to an end; and shortly afterward, when we were about to set out, the girl slipped a package of luncheon into the Doctor's pocket, and when we were some distance down the road, feeling sure that we would look back, she waved an adieu to us with the hickory shirt.

"What do you suppose she meant by saying

Digitized by Google

Griselle would be getting married?" I asked the Doctor.

"A general instinct of her sex," he replied vaguely. "A girl like Griselle is not apt to die an old maid."

"What kind of a man do you suppose she will be apt to marry?"

"I can tell you better," said the Doctor, "the kind of a man she will not marry. It will be the kind you have fixed in your mind that she ought to marry."

We were walking along the grassy path by the side of the road rather briskly, and at this speech I stopped short; and the Doctor doing the same thing, we both stood there a moment, looking each other in the face.

"Did you mean that for a warning, or is it one of your glittering generalities?"

"I meant it for a conclusion, based upon observed facts. You have of course allowed yourself to fall in love with Griselle."

"Why do you say, 'of course'?"

"Because I am better aware than you are of the general tendency of mankind."

"Do you mean to say that the general tendency is to fall in love with Griselle?"

"I mean to say that the general tendency, when there is only one girl in sight, is to think that she is the only one in existence."

"Oh, rubbish; you are putting up your feelings as scientific data."

"And you are verifying my suspicions by talk-

Digitized by Google

ing as if you were actually jealous. Let's change the subject before we quarrel. This is a regenerating morning. Look at those flaming maples. Did you ever see such dyes? Great Scott! what a depth of feeling there is in yellow, if it be only spattered with a little scarlet. Do you know, I think yellow is the major note, after all. It represents in the visual world what sodium does in the universe. Everything tries to imitate gold when it can. There's no passion in it. The magnificent calm of the Chinese has some affiliation with chrome yellow. The Mongolian probably wears the original livery of Eden."

We walked on. "Doctor," I said, "supposing such a thing possible, do you see anything very preposterous in a large, cool, mature admiration for a girl like Griselle?"

"Large, cool, mature admirations are not possible outside of the domain of external nature. Observe that delicious field of burnt umber just turned up; I suppose it is ready for fall planting — rye perhaps. How silver gray every stone in it looks in this light, and how vivid the stems of those white birches by the brook, against it all. Do you know, my boy, there is something restful and recuperative in good virgin dirt? I've got half a dozen hysterical patients who could draw some kind of earthy virtue from the brown field if I could only take their tight shoes off and make them run barefoot in those furrows. Did it ever occur to you that civilization, in abolishing dirt, is very apt to substitute filth? A ploughed

Digitized by Google

field is not half as nasty as the average vaudeville."

"I was thinking," I said, "that a woman like Griselle might really express in her perfection what inanimate Nature is continually trying to say, and cannot."

"There are two Griselles, my boy. One is in Gabe's farmhouse, and the other is in your imagination. There goes an early flock of wild ducks. Listen — you can hear the beat of the wings. I suppose, now, John Burroughs could tell us if they are canvasbacks or mallards by the formation of the flying wedge; but I can't."

"You see," I continued, "a man don't know much about a woman until he gets to be forty."

The Doctor broke in on my speech with: —

"Wait till you are sixty, my boy. A man really doesn't know much about women at forty. You will allow that the judgment is more secure, less liable to be disturbed by mere amorousness, and better able to estimate the intrinsic qualities and the sterling worth of character when he is sixty. One is not so apt to be moved by a pretty face. He sees the essentials more clearly. Keep your eye on that distant line of hills a moment. Notice how they deepen in colour, if you watch them, when one of those white clouds obscures the light. But they never change their forms. The atmosphere in September is very moody and expresses itself in clouds, much more fantastically than in April. I suppose it is because the landscape has more colour in it. Sep-

Digitized by Google

tember reminds me of a man who has reached forty years of age. Listen to the cider-presses, down in that meadow. It's the Yankee's vintage time."

"I have remarked that girl carefully," I said. "She has a magic that defies environment and conditions. She doesn't escape drudgery. She invites and transforms it. Her contented nature is a continual harvest home. I wonder if it is true that Gabe intends to sell out and marry her off."

"Doubtless," said the Doctor. "She is probably engaged to the village blacksmith. Do you smell the wild grapes? They hang high on those old buttonball trees."

"I mentioned to you once before that she is devotedly attached to Charlie."

"He probably doesn't invest her with any magical virtues. I don't think you enjoy such a morning as this as keenly as I do. This air reminds me of one of those English glees that require men's voices. There is always a lusty eagerness in them. Take that glorious old song of 'Hail, Smiling Morn' — Spoffort's, I think. How exultant and Saxon! The voices all seem to be horns. We can't write those songs any more. We seem to have left September out of the repertory. Curious, isn't it, that the farther West music gets, the less muscle it has."

"But you must certainly see that Charlie would be greatly benefited if he had a tenderer hand than mine to shape and guide him while he is ductile."

Digitized by Google

"Did you ever drink any apple juice warm out of a press? Let's go down that old cow-path in the meadow and get a tin dipper full of it."

"A man who has a child," I remarked, "must take into consideration his responsibility. It's a weight he cannot shirk."

"But we agreed to leave all our responsibilities behind us," broke in the Doctor. "Come on, down the cowpath. We are free from all the temporary attachments of the Hotchkiss menage. Nothing will follow us, if we keep in the cow-path — there's a rabbit or something in that bush — look. No, it isn't a rabbit — well, I'll be blessed."

And at that moment the yellow dog put her head through the bushes, and we could see by the disturbance of the leaves that she was wagging her tail inquiringly, Paul Pry fashion, and trying to say, "I hope I don't intrude."

I replied to the Doctor with a subtle look of triumph, but I refrained from gloating over him.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XV

A FRINGED GENTIAN

THE burning leaves and stubble filled the air with a smoky haze, which to the artistic eye is like going over a poem and taking the superfluous adjectives out of it. The autumnal foliage has misty recessions, as if one saw the perspectives through a delicate gauze, as we sometimes see them in the theatre. It is during the bright days when September has merged into October that our landscapes wear for a while the softened gradations that a wet climate affords, and which the English artists, who visit us in August, always miss. They shade their eyes from the chromatic garishness of Midsummer, as if the loveliness were too pronounced. But now the emphasis gives way to suggestiveness. Everything is mellowed by the intervening medium. October does for our picture what time has done for most of the European pictures. The sumach and the Virginia creeper, those proletariats of the

Digitized by Google

American autumn, that flaunt themselves in red shirts and mob caps, are seen through smoked glass. Even the sharply outlined white clouds of September that were so like majolica work in their insistent contrast, have now ripened and melted away at the edges, and have assumed an entirely new fitness to the general drowse.

If you have ever stood upon the Galata bridge at Constantinople in the morning, and looked across the Golden Horn upon Stamboul, you must have been conscious that in those old countries the atmosphere forever prevents colour from becoming impertinent. Man has nowhere lifted so much architectural blazonry into the air as there. The historic city is a pile of softened dyes — gold, and crimson, and scarlet, melting into impalpable greens and swept above and below by a flashing cobalt blue. But it is like a picture of Titian's with its imperishable gamut of pigments played in a low key by time itself. It is only in October that external Nature with us puts on those vanishing distances. It is then only that our Alleghanies and the great bulks of the Rocky Mountains, which are so like the rugged peremptoriness of a Western statesman or a muscular tragedian, catch up with the Tyrol in spectral beauty. The sky drops down with a mantle of gauze and wraps the peaks in opalescent garments, so that the stalwart limbs of the great range imitate the voluptuousness of a half-draped beauty. There is always a week in October when Nature holds a bit of yellow glass to

Digitized by Google

our eyes, and, like children, we catch a glimpse of the golden age. I dare say that the paradisaical fancies of all peoples have been caught through the cathedral windows of the woods in this voluptuous month.

I never knew until the Doctor and I set out to make the acquaintance of October what a sweet mystery it enfolded. Once under the spell I could not quite rid myself of the notion that Nature has her dim religious lights, and sits at times, like Jeremy Taylor's widow, in a clean apron with her hands crossed and her work done. It was impossible not to feel that she had laid her soft muffling finger upon all the cognitions. Every sense was hushed and recipient. Every sound that summer makes sharp and sibilant sunk to a drowsy pianissimo. Every breeze murmured. Even the crows had interposed mellowing spaces. I heard them in a new perspective. It was so with the visual world. I saw that it was drawing a soft drapery around it, and animate things were hushed as if they had come into the chancel of the year.

So, too, October has her special symbols and inscrutable souvenirs, one of which the Doctor hunted up and brought me with as much honest delight as if he had found a new reading of Shakspere, or an old Biblical text had risen up and fitted itself to a new want.

Later we seated ourselves at the foot of a gentle slope, having reached a narrow and brambly margin of a broad meadow. Over on the other side

Digitized by Google

we could see the gnarled and fantastic apple trees, where an old orchard sprawled out into the level land. We heard the softened voices of men and women, who were gathering apples and making cider, and the intermittent creak of the cider-mill was not unlike a late cricket.

That such a vista should lay hold of the sensibilities of two unlike men of the world, not at all given to the "album business," as the Doctor called it, was, I thought, notable, and as I sat down to drink it all in, I remarked that it was like one of those old strains of Bellini's that have a cloying sweetness. But the Doctor thought not. It was an harmonic complex, making interminable music without bars. It reminded him of the swan music in Lohengrin. Whether it was the season or the mood we brought to it, I do not know, but we sat silent a moment to let it play its own tune upon us. Out in the middle of the meadow a winding stream had spread itself into a little lagoon, and round about were pools which looked like blue eyes, and over them the huckleberry bushes leaned, barring and etching the water with a delicate tracery. On either side the grasses spread out in orange, bronze, and tawny bands that melted into each other and made of the meadow a spectrum of the season.

These visual rhythms go very deep into a man's subconsciousness, and the Doctor warned me not to disturb them with any æstheticism. "They cannot be unravelled," he said, "and they resent explication. In that sense they are a higher kind

Digitized by Google

of music that fits itself to man's needs only in his unquestioning acceptance."

But I was thinking of Griselle, and what I wanted to know was why a meadow should call up that maid, and October invite her into every tender picture that it painted on its way. So I asked the Doctor if the beguilement of Nature did not leave something to be desired. I quoted Coleridge at him from memory, —

> "It is her largeness and her overflow,
> Which, being incomplete, disquieteth me so."

"I wonder how Coleridge knew it was incomplete," said the Doctor. "What would you suggest as its consummation?"

"Something human," I replied. "Art and poetry have always tried to supply it. A beautiful landscape is like written music which needs a voice or an instrument. Nature would be very lonesome in her loveliest aspects to a man left alone on this earth. It is impossible even for a materialist to look at this scene without peopling it. If the poets had not personified and humanized Nature, it would be like Shakspere's 'Tempest' with Miranda and Prospero left out."

"And yet," said the Doctor, "Nature goes her own way and is never modified or changed by man's imaginings, which in the main are efflorescences of his magnificent and selfish will. When a man is in love, he sees things only through his desires. Artists and poets are always in love.

Digitized by Google

They think in hyperbole, like Romeo. They are superbly anthropomorphic. Stars throb, trees breathe, waves dance, leaves utter prayers, birds woo. They make the planets think of the same girl that has usurped their minds; the ocean is crammed with Aphrodites — matter is hymeneal. Do you suppose such a fellow is thinking of Nature? Confound it, he is thinking of himself, and cunning Nature, who is thinking of her race, cajoles and fools him to the top of his bent, and when she has accomplished her own purpose, she drops him like a hot potato. The surest way to get rid of the Grecian mythology is to get married. Then old Triton hands his 'wreathed horn' over to the youngest member of the family. Our recent poets string Nature upon their desires. I was reading the other day our friend Cawein, and he has the audacity to say: —

"'There is no rhyme that is half so sweet
As the song of the wind in the rippling wheat.
There is no metre that's half so fine
As the lilt of the brook under rock and vine,
And the loveliest lyric I ever heard
Was the wild-wood strain of a forest bird.'

I don't know that young man, — his poetry proclaims him to be young, — but if ever he settles down, he will probably rewrite that verse something like this: —

"'There is no song that is half so sweet
As the clash of matter one is apt to meet.

Digitized by Google

There is nothing so fine to Jack and Jill
As a natural fluid that runs down hill,
And the loveliest lyric man ever heard
Was not lyric at all, but what he inferred.' "

"It seems to me," I ventured to say, "that you are trying to play the part of Peter Bell, and it does not become you."

"You utterly mistake me. I am only insisting that the sane man shall accept the facts of Nature while he exercises his imagination in using her for his own purposes. She is stuffed full of facts as well as symbols, but they do not always corroborate his desires. Wait a moment — I am going down in that meadow to look for an autumnal fact."

Then off he started, and I saw him poking about among the grasses, sometimes almost lost to view, evidently looking for something with great earnestness.

Left alone I wondered if Griselle would enjoy this scene. It really seemed to me that her presence would in some way banish the incompleteness. I was curious to know how she would regard it. Would she, like so many women I had met, pretend to enjoy it because I did? I could not rid myself of the notion that she would fit into it and interpret it unconsciously.

I heard the Doctor shouting to me as he held up something that looked like a bunch of grass. When he came back, he handed me three or four stems about eighteen inches long of the fringed gentian, each stem having upon its curved branches

Digitized by Google

four or five flowers. I looked at the beautiful specimens with the passing admiration that such wildings always excite, and then I turned to him expectantly to know why he had taken so much trouble to get them.

"The last beautiful words of the season," he said, "the daintiest and most eloquent that she ever speaks."

"It is certainly a very pretty flower," I remarked.

That appeared to vex him a little. "I don't think you know it," he said. "As a rule, city people do not. The poet Bryant wrote some pretty verses on it. I suppose you know that?"

I had to confess that I did not. But I have since read them several times.

"Look here," said the Doctor. "This is the flower of America. They can't make it grow in China, and there are only some dull hints of it in Europe. Nowhere but in our land does it reach its feminine loveliness, and then it makes the fleur-de-lis meagre and the columbine and the violet washed out."

He held the bunch at arm's length in front of him. "Did you ever see branches with such a queenly and pensive curve? It is the grace of a tall beauty making her first bow to the world. The corolla is a perfect Etruscan vase — look at it, lifting four shell-shaped petals beautifully fringed and of an evasive azure that defies description."

"Charming," I said. "Very like a rustic belle."

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

... I turned at the ... beautiful
... I looked ...
... but I take ...

... words "the scene" ...
... eloquent that ...

... power," I ...

... "I don't
... city
... some
... ?"
... But I have
... "This is the
... it grow in
... elements of it in
... Nor ... teach
... it makes the
... and the

... in front of
... with such a
... ? It is the grace of a
... bow to the world.
... —look
... petals beauti-
... that deifies

... "You're a rustic belle."

Digitized by Google



I LOOKED AT THE BEAUTIFUL SPECIMENS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

"Nothing so beautiful in all our fields. Were it to grow in Thibet, they would canonize it. Persia would ascribe supernatural virtue to it. Greece would have immortalized it; but not having it, she had to take up with the less regal flower, Narcissus. I dare say, if we could get into the community of flowers, we should find that this is the queen, though it is a shame to call her a queen when she refuses to grow in any but a republican country. Isn't that spray exactly the curve of fresh beauty making vassals of us all by mere contour? Zenobia never held her head more proudly, and Cleopatra could not wrap herself so luxuriously after her bath as this poor princess of the wild-wood."

This strain quite caught me. "I am glad to hear you attribute such human qualities to a flower," I said. "I was inclined to do that myself, just now, and, to be idiomatic, you sat upon me."

"Do you observe," said the Doctor, "that she is wrapping her tissuey shawls about her and hiding her face? Look at the spiral fringe; did you ever see such an airy twist as that? The Sultan's women try to do it with their laces. If one of our serpentine dancers could do that, she would take Paris by storm."

It was true — the flowers had closed up spirally, and the line of fringe on each one of the four leaves of the corolla were wound about as when a belle wraps herself after the ball.

"You are right," I said. "I never saw a

Digitized by Google

flower before with such a feminine grace. I am glad that it attracted you, and that you captured it. You are only human, like myself."

"Perhaps I'm inhuman," he replied. "Doctors are apt to have that reputation, for the flower has resented my impertinence. That is a fact to which I wanted to call your attention. This beautiful and almost human wild flower is placed wholly beyond the desires or the plans of man. It hides away from him. It will not grow in his garden. A thousand attempts have been made to domesticate it, in vain. It disdains the parterre, and refuses to bloom in the hothouse. It is the true child of Nature, and if you pluck it as I have done, it draws itself together, hides its virgin beauty like a true vestal, and dies draped."

Then the Doctor, who, when he fires his gun, always wants to get out of range, added: "Well, let's be going. We don't want to sit here all day, do we?"

It must have been two weeks later. We had returned from our tramp, and after a great deal of skirmishing, I succeeded in getting Griselle to let me drive her over and show her that scene. She took a heavy wrap, for the wind was sharp. It was the first time that I had dared to make a companion of her, and as I had taken good care to leave Charlie behind, we were seated side by side for a couple of hours. Some kind of unreasonable desire to have the reality on that very spot where so much ideality had been wasted possessed me. There was no accounting for these

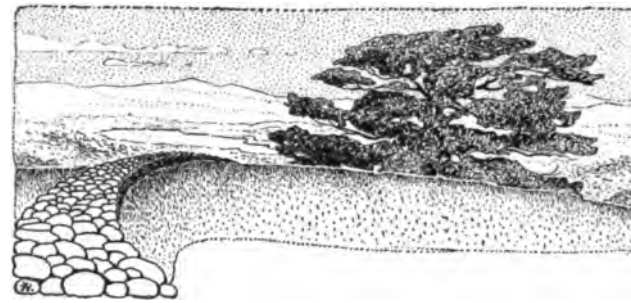
Digitized by Google

masculine whimsies. All that is worth telling at this time is, that when I reached the spot where the Doctor and I had sat down, October had changed her tune and her dress. It was late in the afternoon, and the sky was filled up with what Keats calls "herded elephants slow moving in the west," and low down, where the sun struck through, they were caparisoned in gold brocade and carried flaming plunder. It was dismal enough. The color was all out of the meadow, save where the pools seemed to wink their blood-shot eyes at us, as the stiff wind swayed the huckleberry bushes. Griselle wound her wrap about her and seemed to retire within it. Only her face was visible, and that wore an inquiring and somewhat vacuous look.

It gave me a numb feeling of despair. And yet as she stood there, wound about as if by the wind, I could not help saying to myself, "The fringed gentian."



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XVI

STRAMONIUM

IN our purposeless wandering over roads that led nowhere, the Doctor and I came at last to some discomfort — that is to say, it would have been discomfort but for the Doctor. We had trudged along the whole afternoon, stopping to get a drink of buttermilk at a small dairy over a brook, and there the Doctor, fascinated by the rolls of fresh butter, had bought half a pound, and the buxom dairymaid had rolled it up in two or three cool cabbage leaves. As we came along the road, and I saw him carrying that bundle carefully in his hand, I asked him what he expected to do with it; whereupon he asked me to hold it a moment and went off into a near-by field, where I saw him bent over, kicking and scratching as if in search of something. When he came back he had three or four good-sized potatoes, which he exhibited with unbounded admiration, and insisted on washing them off at the first rivulet we encountered.

Digitized by Google

It grew gray and chilly toward sunset. The wind was blowing from the east, and presently it began to rain — that kind of fine slanting rain that Gabe called "carpet tacks," and that is specially cheerless and makes you think it much colder than it really is. Where we were, neither of us knew. All the perspectives that had fed us with pictures were rapidly obliterated by a leaden mist, and as the prospect closed heavily in about us, we instinctively came closer together. I think the Doctor's effort to enjoy it was a little obvious and somewhat marred by his absurd determination to keep the half pound of butter some distance from his person.

"It will hardly add to our store of pleasant memories to plod all night in this," I ventured to remark, as I slapped the drip off my soft hat. "There is a lively prospect of our being soaked to the bone."

"If we do not run upon a house," he said, "we shall have to crawl into some cave or covert. You have read of such experiences, I suppose, when you were a boy."

"Very delightful to read about," I suggested.

"I dare say we can find a shelter of some kind. The animals do. That's the fun of it. To have brought a waterproof house and modern conveniences along would have been æsthetic poltroonery."

"It looks to me as if it had set in for a week."

"Very likely. It usually does about this time of year. Haven't you ever noticed the propriety and regularity of the seasons? They go on with

Digitized by Google

their work utterly regardless of the audience. That's what I admire about them. Your eyes are better than mine — what do you make that thing to be that is sticking up over in that field?"

"I should say it was an old hayrick or sheep-fold."

"Then we are saved," said the Doctor, "if it is thatched. Forward."

He caught me by the arm as we trudged up a sloping field, the fine rain driving in our faces, and the night coming on sheeted and drizzly. There was a nasty wind that blew stertorously among the wet trees, and as we approached the old shed, it lifted and banged some loose portion of the structure with a snappish clatter. I felt that the season had put on its shroud and was wailing hideously. I thought of a cosey corner in my restaurant, where there was apt to be at this hour a pleasant odour of cut roses and black coffee, and a lively gathering of gourmands, with jaded appetites for a late dinner. I found myself once or twice turning round, rather mechanically, to call a cab, and then the wind slapped me in the face. And all the time the perennial and inextinguishable Doctor sustained a really superior complacency of indifference to anything but his own authoritative babble. "If a man can learn to laugh with vital defiance at these beneficent ordinances of the atmosphere," he said, "he will in time arrive at the supreme stoicism that can take Death by the hand and call him a jolly good fellow."

Digitized by Google

The remark rather overreached me at the moment, for I was holding my hat on with one hand, and its flapping in my face interfered with the proper reflective processes.

The old shed proved to be some kind of a forlorn sheepfold and hayrick combined, which had evidently been long unused. It was only partly enclosed, for its roof was half gone, and one end of it was open to the elements. What was formerly the entrance was flanked by two great weeds, six feet high, very green and lush, and still bearing a few large white trumpet-flowers, that shone through the gathering gloom quite funereally, I thought.

"Stramonium," said the Doctor, actually stopping to investigate it as if he had met an old friend. "I never saw it in bloom so late."

With sullen disregard of his triviality I got inside the pen, and, finding that one end of it was dry with a thatch over it, I leaned up against one of the old posts and remarked: —

"There must be a house somewhere to match this outwork. We might as well find it before night sets in."

"It *has* set in," said the Doctor. "We should probably wander round for an hour looking for it. You cannot see twenty feet ahead of you."

"That's cheerful," I said. "We can't stay here — that's certain. I'm wet through and chilled to the bone. You seem to have forgotten that I'm your patient."

He had put one of the trumpet-flowers in the

Digitized by Google

lapel of his coat, as if he were going to an evening party, and was wiping his face and neck with a white handkerchief.

"Quite right," he replied. "Suppose you go on. It will be as dark as Erebus in half an hour. After you have wandered in the mud for a while, you will probably walk off a bank or tumble into a hole. It's usually the way with men who seek comfort instead of accepting it; I'll stay here and give thanks as the animals probably did before we got here."

"Spend the night in this cow-shed?" I asked, with as much bitterness as incredulity could muster.

"Cow-shed," he repeated, drawing himself up with admirable inflation. "An ark of refuge, sir. There are no cow-sheds in a healthy mind. You are too particular. I suppose if a man offered you a last straw, you would want to know if it was wheat or rye. Cow-shed — we'll make this pavilion glow like the morning star."

"Doctor," I said, "there seems to be a sort of gallery at this end of the ark. I suppose it was intended for fodder in the pastoral age. I'll climb up and see if I can discern a hospitable light in the neighbourhood."

"Do," said he; "there are some remnants of a ladder against the siding. Be sure of the flooring or you will come through. If you see a friendly gleam sing out 'Sail ho!'"

I scrambled up as best I could, and found the loft heaped with corn-husks and stalks that

Digitized by Google

rustled sharply under my exploring foot. After much crawling and stumbling and groping, I found a crack in the siding. As I put my eye to it a sharp arrow of wet wind came through it and transfixed me. There was nothing to be seen but darkening rain-gusts, with sombre smears of hills and ghastly fields. As far as I could penetrate, the rain was coming down steadily in business-like sheets of desolation. When I came to the edge of the platform and looked down, there was the Doctor some ten feet below me with his coat off, whistling "Lead, Kindly Light," and trying to scratch a damp match. I looked at him with curious interest. "What are you trying to do?" I asked.

"I am trying to get supper," he answered without looking up. "How's the bedroom? Dry?"

I believe I tried to execute a true metropolitan sneer and drop it on him, but it went off half cocked into a derisive chuckle, and he called up to me: "If there are any dry corn-cobs up there, shove 'em down. They make a peat fire."

I believe I pushed a half a ton of corn-cobs down with my foot, making as much dust as possible, and then I climbed down myself. No man with the slightest vestige of his primitive masculinity surviving could withstand the Doctor's defiant jollity of spirit. I soon found myself piling corn-cobs "criss-cross," and watching the Doctor down on his marrow-bones blowing at the husks he had lighted, which presently broke

Digitized by Google

out into a flickering flame and sent up a thread of scented smoke, whereupon he stepped back and admired it as if he had seen a patient coming out of a syncope. I placed armful after armful of the cobs on end around the little blaze and saw them with boyish delight turn into glowing coals and totter over into a bed of ashes, the pile throwing out a pleasant warmth and a phosphorescent glow that changed the whole aspect of affairs. The rain rattled on the siding and came at times in windy swashes that made the old structure bend and creak, but it only added to the glow of our fire that made a pleasant circle of red light and threw our moving shadows in grotesque silhouettes against the walls. We hung our corduroy jackets on some projecting boards to dry and frisked round in our flannel shirts. Finding two short logs, which at some time had evidently been used as milking-stools, the Doctor tore off a loose board and extemporized a little table, upon which he spread the remnants of a lunch that he drew from his capacious pockets. Then, seeing it laid out, he took the trumpet-flower from his coat and stuck it in a crack of the board as a decorative touch, and gave himself, with many airs of connoisseurship, to the roasting of his pet potatoes, an exquisite job which consisted in "chucking them into the ashes" and not letting them burn up.

I recall now with reminiscent pleasure how my old friend wooed me into the boyishness of all this, making me forget all my discomfort, and

Digitized by Google

before I was well aware of it, cajoling me into the improvisation with a clear zest. What would I not give if I had a picture of that pair of voluntary gypsies, sitting there in the glow, under a canopy of smoke, making ogreish shadows and eating their baked potatoes with chop-sticks, as if they were Olympians, the Doctor's own glow outshining the fire, and answering the gust outside with heartier gusts of laughter within. He had to initiate me into the esoterics of baked potato. When he pulled the black lumps out of the fire, and burned his fingers, and danced the cancan, and slapped his flanks before he landed the charcoal on the board, his antic shadow filled me with juvenile mirth, and, wraiths of Arden and ghosts of Lincoln Green, how I laughed!

"Charcoal is good for the stomach, I suppose," I remarked, as I looked at the burned chunks.

"Charcoal," he cried, snapping his burnt fingers. "Ambrosia. You take him up in a corn-husk, thus, like a napkin, knock the top off, this way, put in a goodly chunk of butter, and, gods of the cuisine! tamales and yams and bread-fruit hide themselves in tropic insignificance."

I have often tried since to restore that potato episode, but it cannot be done without corn-cobs, and, I suspect, a cow-shed. The range oven kills the delicious earthy aroma. The potato must be tumbled into the hot ashes, and all the essences driven in and confined in a jacket of charcoal. "There is just the difference," said the Doctor, "in eating the fruit this way and

Digitized by Google

eating it embalmed by a French restaurateur, that there is in hearing a fine oration and reading the report of it the next morning. A potato must be smelted in its own ashes. Then it has the fine flavour of martyrdom combined with the aroma of Father Prout."

Then that roistering old savant, shut off from his own world by the whistling rain, actually became jovial, as if the potato, properly baked, was intoxicating; and before I knew it he was trolling a stave of an old and forgotten song:—

"At all feasts, if enough,
I most heartily stuff,
And a song at my heart alike rushes,
Though I've not fed my lungs
Upon nightingale's tongues,
Nor the brains of goldfinches or thrushes."

This struck me as being somewhat reckless. I had my doubts about the philosophy, but he cut me short by saying, "Some doubts are like dirty water; let them alone and they will evaporate"; and then he pulled out the white flower, saying, "we live in a world of similitudes—that's stramonium."

"Yes, you said that before. Go ahead. There seems to be a text in it."

"It's a symbol that has baffled man ever since the time of Pliny. It belongs to the reptilian class of plants and has followed in the footsteps of man ever since the Fall. Unlike the gentian,

Digitized by Google

it flaunts itself all about his beaten tracks and reminds him of the snake story. No one ever found it in the wilderness."

"It looks something like a morning-glory."

"That's it. I suppose it tries to imitate the morning-glory round the cow-sheds, and children who mistake it often die. A strange, occult, serpentine plant with a virus in it. If you put a white man down in Africa or Alaska, up it comes for the first time with its trumpet-flower. Pliny calls it Nepenthe and says the sibyls drank its juice. The negroes along the James River have a superstition that if you put the leaves under your pillow, you will dream of snakes."

"All of which is very interesting, Doctor, in materia medica, but will you kindly come to the similitude?"

"Doesn't it grow in society? Haven't you encountered the trumpet-flower in life, so like a morning-glory, with a fang under it? Haven't you seen men wear it on their breasts and then dream of snakes? Isn't it rather strange that the earth's flora should spring its Marguerites and its Messalinas — flowers that hide away and almost die if you touch them, like the mimosa, and flowers that flaunt themselves at the doorways and hold out brazen corolla like that, always growing where the soil is rank?"

"Let me look at it. It has a peculiar odour, slightly fetid."

"But it does not shrink if you handle it."

"What are its medical results?"

Digitized by Google

"Dilatation, delirium, incoherence, frenzy, death. Throw it away."

"I'll drop it in the fire, see? Let's change the subject. I never did care much for trumpet-flowers."

"My dear fellow, your knowledge of flowers is very limited. You obtained it in a hothouse. You think they were created for buttonholes. There are, however, some kinds that die there, and then men throw them away."

"Oh, nonsense. Don't reduce me to the traditional brute. There are flowers which, if they once take root in a man's soul, embower and sanctify his whole life, and then he sits, as the old seer said, under his own vine and fig tree."

At which the Doctor took his cigar out of his mouth, emitted a long, low whistle, and then throwing the stump into the fire, said: —

"Suppose we go upstairs to bed."

Then it was that Cuyp or some other Dutchman should have seen us climbing up that old ladder, the yellow dog barking after us with alarm, as if he thought we were leaving the earth.

And so, we rolled ourselves in husks, pulled the dry stalks under our heads, and with a canopy of smoke over us, fell asleep like two tired gypsies, the yellow dog keeping watch by the embers below, and we never knowing until morning broke that the field mice ran over us all night.

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XVII

CHESTNUTS BY THE WAY

"A MAN at sixty," said the Doctor, "is apt to find himself opening an account with life. He starts a set of books in his consciousness and begins a debit and credit account, striking daily balances. Owe so much to sleep; paid out so much to a late supper; borrowed of enthusiasm; lost by last night's emotions, etc. He becomes the banker of his own blood, trying by hoarding his supplies to keep himself in circulation. It is the first stage of an insidious decrepitude to take care of one's self. He has lost the divine gift of heedless enthusiasms; those noble impulses that lifted him headlong over every barrier with an aërated optimism that winged him with a godlike recklessness. I have a great admiration for the superb animality of youth. Every man of sixty has."

"I do not see why he should have," I ven-

Digitized by Google

tured to remark, "when he, like you, has preserved so much of it."

"But I have to *try* to preserve it, my dear fellow. That's the rub. If I had known as much at your age as I know now, I would have let it preserve itself."

"Oh, it has, Doctor. It has; believe me."

It was still October, and six o'clock in the morning. We were miles from nowhere, standing side by side in a fall exhibition, where every picture was on the line, and all the artists had gone away.

I suppose it is the crowning futility of sentimentalism to try and remember all the sunrises and sunsets of one's heydays. It only adds to one's late pathos in life to open his old album and smile wearily at the souvenirs that have grown meaningless. How many pages with a crisp remnant of perished stalk or leaf, and under it the attempt to fasten the fleeting emotion in words — "A happy day at ——," or "A little souvenir of unalloyed brightness." How clumsily we try to climb back on these faded memorials to suggested heights, and how invariably we give it up with the appalling conviction that the emotion, whatever it was, belonged only to that hour, like the flower. But here and there some sunrises burn themselves into the page of our experience without our aid, and they stay like the golden shield that some one hangs upon our wall, catching the same old light even when our eyes have grown dim.

I can see now that those sunrises were only half

Digitized by Google

on the horizon. The other half was in the soul. If there is not a responsive luminary within that rises with equal gladness and stretches out a kindred ray, then are we cattle. I think it is well to keep an album for these daybreaks of the soul. Not that it shall be shown, but that it may shine permanently into one's own private darks. And I am free to confess that I should never have made this discovery of my own sunrise if the Doctor had not been along with me and in his own vital way pointed out to me that if there are any darks at all, it is the fault of our vision.

Six o'clock of an October morning, and two men of the world, mind you, standing by the side of a cow-shed, drunken with the prospect; actually struck dumb for a few moments by the blazonry of the regularly uneventful. The sun was coming up behind the distant trees. We looked at it as if it were a revelation. My idea of a sunrise was of something placidly grand; a kind of orbed and systematic attention to business; something superbly unperturbed and inevitable and too far off to elicit more than a respectful awe. But this sunrise had a reckless dance in it. We had caught the old orb unawares in a positive dithyramb, and as I watched the choric rhythmus in the trees, flashing and leaping amid the gnarled branches that took on grotesque involutions — in one blessed instant I felt sure that there were satyrs and fauns, wet with the cool dew, cavorting in Attic exuberance under those trees.

On the opposite side of our outlook the groves

Digitized by Google

along the high ground were beginning to breathe in colours at the top in a long rim of deepening dyes, with measureless chasms of changing shadows at the bottom, that opened depth after depth of colour as the light crawled down. There were some gray clouds outstretched above, like spectral arms in a benediction, and as we looked, they softly receded blushingly, like belated ghosts, as the king in his majesty came revelling up.

The Doctor looked at me. "So Dionysos and Arion saw it," he said. "So the shepherd-poet saw it, on the edge of the vanishing night, when he stood with his flocks in the fields of Palestine and called on the hills to clap their hands, which you can see they are now doing. I can pick out every psalm that was inspired by the daybreak; there is a lusty elemental crow in it. How is your sense of smell this morning? Do you detect a flavor of fried ham on this atmosphere? There is a little pillar of smoke twisting up under that hill. I dare say now that we can get some 'biled coffee' there. Let us on."

He was right. We stood up in a big summer kitchen among some stalwart farm hands and took our bowls of "biled coffee" ravenously. It was heavy and yellow with cream. It had a humble "body" that no French distillation ever had. What it lacked in aroma it made up in fibre. The windows were wide open. The stiff western breeze blew through and wrapped the frocks of the maids about their legs, as they waited on us, and the men in their shirt-sleeves were bois-

Digitized by Google

terously good-natured and rudely gallant. I retain a vivid picture in my memory of a broad-hipped, red-faced, bare-armed Gretchen with an enormous loaf of home-made bread against her breast, as she drew a big knife through it, and cut off a slice as big and as thick as a sirloin steak, and handed it on the point of the knife to a handsome fellow, who immediately poured the molasses over it and fell to devouring it with a carnivorous zest that was softened and, I might say, enamelled by his smile and his white teeth. So intent was I on these happy rustics, and so easily did they fit themselves into the oxygen and translucence of the morning, without taking any heed, that they grew in my fancy perilously near to being the fauns and satyrs that the sun and my vagrant fantasy had evoked, and the half hour went by without my knowing it.

When we set out on our journey, we easily walked out of a reality into an illusion that had been warmed by the morning. The air was what Shakspere called "nipping and eager," but we enjoyed it as one does the grip of a strong hand or the prickle of the surf. We were both unusually springy in step and full-lunged, and the Doctor assured me that it was not alone the oxygen, but the disencumberment. I dare say he was right. I remember that morning now because the world suddenly appeared to be deeper, calmer, and less dependent on anything I could do in it, which I understood later, thanks to the Doctor, was a symptom of health. Some of the things the

Digitized by Google

Doctor had said began to take on a new light at the top. "If you want to see how beautiful the world is, go up on the mountain. If you want to know how brave and patient it is, go down in the coal mine. There are sunrises even in disaster." I have tried that sentence on others since, just to see if they had any auroral apprehension. Some lights were beginning to burn for me along lower ranges, and these steady little lamps seemed to have been lit by the sun.

When we looked back at our hayrick, it was turned into a golden dome against the western sky, and the naked fields beyond were trying to wrap their furrows in pink scarfs. We came to a bit of table-land intersected by the road, and by this time the sun was above the trees, with one or two islands of transparent coral floating over its lower limb. As the rays fell across the higher levels, they tipped every detail with rosy light, and all at once we saw the old earth at her morning sacrifice, sending up incense from a thousand altars.

By the side of the road stood a magnificent chestnut tree. It was one of the bronzes that October keeps in reserve for her exhibition day. It lifted its great splendour against the deep blue like a knight in golden armour. We both stood a moment at some little distance, caught open-eyed by the magic of its transformation, without suspecting that we had ourselves been magically transformed into artists. I wondered like a child at the alchemy of light, that could turn blood and rust and earthly ochres into such burnished efful-

Digitized by Google

gence. The great bole of the tree came down and gnarled itself into the earth with mighty convolutions. The bursting burrs had been shaken down by the wind, and they shone in the dead leaves like lumps of flesh as the rays picked them out.

"We have caught the atoms at their Orphic hymn," said the Doctor, softly.

Under the tree, hunting in the dead leaves, were two children with little tin pails, such as one sees in the stores with lard in them. The elder, a boy of eight, barefooted, was running heedlessly among the burrs, intent only on filling his pail. The other, a girl of six, was digging her plump fist into her eyes and holding her little head down in inexpressible sorrow. As we came up, she made a start like a bird as if to run, and the Doctor caught her. "What's the matter, my little maid?" he said. "Are you cold?"

"Oh, she's afraid of the burrs," said the boy. "A girl's no good to pick chestnuts, anyway."

He had his pail half full and went on with his gathering quite disdainfully. The Doctor lifted the little woman up into the air, and I looked into her pail. There were two miserable chestnuts rattling on the bottom, and one was wormy. As he held her there a moment, she looked like a chestnut herself, so ripe and brown. Her two plump little cheeks were just as hard and inviting, and her swimming eyes were the same colour. Her little brown legs hung down, only half-covered with stockings, and her plump pads of

Digitized by Google

feet were covered with broken slippers, into which the prickles of the burrs were saucily sticking. She wore a dilapidated chip hat, with a bit of blue ribbon on it, and under it the chestnut curls were trying to imitate the tree above her with golden interlacing and burnished strands.

"Why, you poor little mother spark," said the Doctor, kissing her squarely on the bulgy cheek, and throwing her up on one arm, as he took the pail in his other hand. "He wouldn't even pull the prickles out of your shoes, the young Indian."

"He don't tare a bit," said the chestnut, as her arm went round the Doctor's neck.

"Of course he doesn't; boys don't care for anything. But we'll just beat him dead. You and I'll fill the pail. Don't cry any more. Let me wipe the wet off your chubby little face."

"I don't like to hunt for chesn's," she said. And this conveyed to the Doctor the whole inscrutable sex difference in these germs. She wasn't interested in chestnuts. Her heart was broken because chestnuts had made the only companion she had utterly indifferent to her. It was like discovering a tiny rill of the universal sweet water trying to come up between the stones and the stubble.

"Of course, of course, what can you expect of a puppy man? He's young and inhuman. Look at me, my dear."

I think the spark of woman understood clearly what the Doctor did not say, namely, that he was old and sympathetic, for she wound her brown

Digitized by Google

arm round his burly neck and looked down at the indifferent cub very much as if she had come to her inalienable rights.

"I'll tell you what we'll do. You shall sit on the sheltered side of that trunk, on one of those roots, and we'll fill your pail. How does that strike your ladyship?"

I suppose it struck her ladyship as the only proper course that should have been followed from the first. The Doctor carried her across the carpeted space made by the great canopy of the tree, the side lights hitting her with successive shafts as she passed, and the shadows dappling her with a kind of bo-peep. He set her high up on a root, pulled the prickles out of her broken slipper, put the latchet round her ankle, and placed the pail in her lap. I had already picked up a handful of the nuts, and I walked up and turned them obediently into the pail, where they made a loud tinkle. The Doctor had to put on his glasses to do his share. The boy looked at him with momentary surprise, and then concentrated all his contempt into one brief remark: "Well, I'll be dod gormed!" But the young scamp managed to keep just ahead of the Doctor and snatch the best prizes, until he got a shove from a lusty foot that rolled him over, at which there came a little piccolo burst of laughter from the tree-trunk. The acorn of a woman was already the little lady of the joust, for whose smiles we were digging into the dead leaves with our gloves on.

Digitized by Google

"If we succeed in outdoing that cub," I remarked, "I should not be surprised to see the little lady take that blue ribbon off her hat and pin it on your coat, Sir Launcelot."

"The little fraud," replied the Doctor, "do you see how she is trying to stimulate us with baby smiles? They get out of their cradles ready-made, and I'm not punning either."

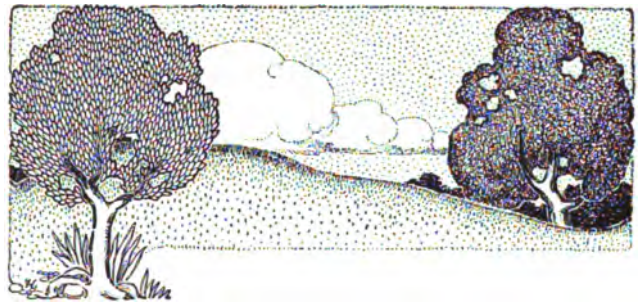
We stopped to argue, and the boy beat us. In a contest of brains and juvenile brawn, brains will get the worst of it when chestnutting. While the Doctor was throwing one of his sarcasms around, the cub filled his pail.

"Woman," said the Doctor, "is always a hallucination. Even at six she sits on a throne regally and reigns without governing."

Then the boy, having accomplished his task, proposed that one of us climb up and thrash the tree, if we wanted to fill the other pail, and I quite fell in with this humorous idea, for certainly nothing could be more jolly than to see the Doctor in his spectacles clasping that tree with his arms and legs while I "boosted" him up, and the little maid clapping her hands, and the yellow dog going round about like a clown round a circus pole.

But the Doctor paid no attention to the suggestion, and lifting the little brown maiden on his shoulder, we started up the road, I carrying the pail.

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XVIII

OUT IN THE COLD

THE first frost that touched us in the waning October had gloves on. It was gentle and uncertain. It left little filmy crystals, exquisitely wrought, clinging helplessly close along the still fringes of the pools. I understood by these first tiny shoots that winter germinated like spring, having its tender pellicles and fragile blades; the infancy, in fact, of its flowering life, afterward to bloom like a great camellia in snowdrifts, and come to its autumn of falling icicles and asthmatic gusts. The first efflorescence of the bleak season was, therefore, curiously infantile. I had never had my attention called to it before, and now it seemed as if I had been in at the birth. It was like a new intimacy with the old sovereign system. Perhaps there was in me some molecular response, as there is in the capillary hearts of the oak and the elm, where arcane saps rise and fall in the

Digitized by Google

great swing of the universal tides. The first fretwork of the winter seemed rather winsome. It was like the goo-goo of an Indian baby, as if Boreas were not yet out of his hyperborean cradle, but, done up in laces, allowed you to take liberties with him before he was able to go upon the war-path. To begin the better acquaintance with the traditional ruffian at this helpless stage, and to see him grow and bluster confidentially, is to rob him of his traditional terror.

In our *colloquia peripatetica*, my Virgil, the Doctor, threw a good deal of his delightful rhapsodical light upon the cold, but it was less his plunging philosophy than my new intimacy with the reputed monster that stirred the vegetable sap of me, and sent it to the roots of things.

"Cold," the Doctor said, with a superb air of finality, "is man's chief bugaboo, created by his sensory nerves. He has declared that heat is life and cold is death — a preposterous conclusion that modern science is doing its best to upset."

He defied me to furnish one scrap of revelation or analogy to show that heaven is heated; and all the traditions, he said, plainly set forth that the other place is. "What nonsense it was to say that cold was death, when cold absolutely interfered with all the processes of death; and a frozen man puts a stopper on dissolution, while, on the other hand, heat was a destroyer, a consumer. It was the cold-blooded animals that lived the longest. Some of the pythons," he declared, "had lived a thousand years." He

Digitized by Google

was glad to know that physical research in our day was unlocking some of the benign secrets of the cold and putting ice on the hypotheses of our fathers. There was priceless knowledge to be drawn from the zero of the ether, when men got through digging for the central fires.

Then the Doctor, who, when he touched upon the secrets of his own profession, always took on a little hush, as if there were some dire mysteries in it that must not be betrayed to lay ears, bent down and said softly: "Invalids die of heat, not of cold. Life is never congealed, it is burnt out; and when at last the fires are extinguished, all the combustible stuff has been purged away, and if there is any ethereal life it begins in the cold."

"Nevertheless, Doctor," I said, "I should not like to be caught on a prairie in a blizzard."

"I have been," he replied. "It is one of the most beautiful lessons of the august Mother."

"What is?"

"To be caught on the plains in a blizzard, if you have with you one or two primitive heathen who obey Nature instead of defying her."

"Oh, of course, if you have trained guides to bring you out in spite of the benign Mother."

"That is just what the guide does not do. The arrogant intelligence of the godlike man would wrestle with it and get thrown. We hugged it; lay down in it like good children, and were covered up with warm blankets and tucked in, and when morning broke we gave thanks and pursued our journey on a crystal highway."

Digitized by Google

There were always some frosty crystals in the Doctor's talk. He invariably blew from the west.

In such purposeless wandering as ours we were sure to stumble on hamlets lying between the hills snugly, with blue ribbons of river winding through, as if the toy houses were strung upon them. They were all alike, sending up little pillars of smoke in the mornings lazily, which spread out in amber clouds above, that gave a sort of auroral drench of brown sherry to the view. I suppose the continent is dotted with them from the Atlantic to the Pacific; and looked at from the 'vantage-ground of the morning through the veil of the ascending incense, these little towns suggest for civilization the same germinative process that Nature employs. They cling along the little rivers like the frost-work, but they have in them the enfolded fibres of cities. To a man somewhat bruised by too much life, the complacency of these villages was interesting. They lacked corporate self-consciousness. A delightful air of improvisation hung over them, as if the people had accidentally met there, and, finding it pleasant, had concluded to stop, a natural accretion and solidification of dispersed agricultural elements taking on the first form of social life. When we penetrated into one of these hamlets in search of its tavern, these characteristics became more pronounced. The town held easily and loosely together, linked by the wheelwright, the blacksmith, the storekeeper, and the shoemaker, into a stout

Digitized by Google

associate chain, and it had somewhere, no doubt, the schoolmaster and the dominie who were the dry batteries at each end of it.

It was interesting to note how large a place the first frost occupied in the minds of this community. Thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit was in some way an event that mingled in the morning salutations. It was the first thing the landlord of the tavern spoke of. "Well," he remarked, with beaming satisfaction, "we had a frost last night." The wheelwright reminded the shoemaker of it, and the shoemaker smiled and reminded the storekeeper.

I had just learned that a sunrise, to my astonishment, may be an epoch. I had seen that commonplace event turned into a pageant, covering the prosaic old earth with halos, so that the dullard material took on an atomic apotheosis. It was like a romance of Victor Hugo's, in which all the scullions talk *mots*, and the *canaille* act epigrams; but I had hardly expected to see the frost poke its glittering needles into the disposition of men and lace their little outlooks with airy filigree. I tried to think of myself going about in Broad Street, in the morning, grasping stockbrokers by the hand and saying, with joy and gladness, "Lift up your eyes, brother, it has arrived."

"What has arrived, Colonel?"

"The frost. She went down to thirty degrees last night. Hurrah!"

I do not say that my fraternal associates would

Digitized by Google

look askance and begin to inquire how much paper I had out, and whether I had been buying diamonds lately. But by all odds they would wonder at the triviality of an immortal soul that could interest itself in the vagaries of the season, when there were so many large events waiting on the market.

But, of course, when the markets are forgotten in the wreck of matter with all its events, the frosts will still come, and when the globe itself is burned to a cinder, other suns will rise somewhere, and other winters weave the same old crystals; all of which is intolerably eternal and preachy, I know, but when the frost gets into one's mind, these films spin themselves across the reflection; and the first frost had affected me like the first gray hairs. These confoundedly complacent termites in their village carried about with them an air of self-assurance. They gave you to understand that their kerosene lamps were filled and trimmed, and their treasures laid up in their cellars, and the world could go hang itself. A stranger is peculiarly susceptible to this kind of well-built impudence when the frost comes. He rather enjoys it in August or September, when one can get along without a kerosene lamp or a woodpile, but in late October it puts him at some disadvantage. It has the import of a parable, and knocks gently at his conscience or his moral thrift — shakes up his retrospection, so that he looks through the colours of his autumn for the coming ghost. These fellows, the Doctor said, were like

Digitized by Google

the man who is well insured, and when his house gets afire, takes his tin box and sits on his lawn, and rather enjoys the effort of other people to stop the blaze. On the other hand, they reminded me of the man in the blizzard, who wraps the storm about him and lies down to pleasant slumbers. One cannot escape the premonitory note in the frost.

I walked briskly up and down the one street of the hamlet, rather oppressed by its hearty familiarity. Everybody gave me a cheery good-morning, and went about his business as if I were of less importance than the frost. So I was forced in self-superiority to become retrospective, and I called on my past to come up and shine for my rescue. It was very much like looking over a collection of old menus that cannot preserve the appetite. Fancy a man whose memories smell of stale consommé. How splendid my airy parabola against the burrowing in the earth of these contented souls! What effervescent feasting; what memorable chewings and swallowings; what rockets went up night after night; what siren faces swept by with the same set smiles; what a lot of sensuous strains; what exquisite badinage; what stimulant mockery of each other! Something told me that this was like looking through the empyrean for the lost sticks we sent up, as if one could recover the precious sizzlings and sputterings and coruscating extinction. Perhaps, after all, this is where the real weariness is. The truth of the matter is, that a man cannot be a joyous vagrant

Digitized by Google

with a spontaneous zest after the frost comes. It drives the gayety of thought ahead of it as it drives the birds. There must be cellars in a man's disposition that ought to be well stored when the cold sets in. Mine had a kind of echoing emptiness, as if I had put spangles on the shelves instead of potatoes.

A man does not see the fun of wandering about aimlessly in the face of a northeast twister. I recalled that little nut-brown maid that the Doctor had carried on his shoulder, and who had given him a hug and flown out into the dark like a frightened bird. I pictured him clutching after it as one will after a dream, when he wakes up.

"We must get back, Doctor," I said, "there's a big storm brewing."

The Doctor looked at me. "Metaphorically or literally?" he asked.

"Literally."

"I've been making some inquiries," he said, "and it isn't an easy matter. We are just eighteen miles from the railroad and twenty by the highway from Hecuba. It is Hecuba you are thinking about, I suppose."

"I am thinking about a lot of things. Waste of time is one of them. I have something serious to do. In fact, this frost has given me the blues, and I want to get back."

"Egad," said the Doctor, "it's a good sign. I've often noticed that the best way to go on is to go back. But it's damnably difficult sometimes.

Digitized by Google

There isn't a team in this place that we can hire or steal."

Then, it so happened that we received a good deal of wholesome irony from the butcher and others, instead of sympathy. They were wholly unable to comprehend how anybody could get somewhere without purpose, and not know how to get somewhere else.

The exultation of these inhabitants over a frost that had gone, grew into something like a wild delight at the prospect of a coming "twister." They informed us on all sides that a big storm was brooding and as our vagabondage had extended as far as the Doctor's engagements permitted, we began to think about a conveyance to rattle us back before the storm broke. The landlord of the tavern looked at us in blank helplessness. "You'll find it pretty hard to get a rig, I guess," he said. "I don't know of anybody who could spare a team just to drive you twenty miles, unless it's the young man over there that works in the wheelwright's shop. He's got a horse that ain't in use, but I don't think he'd stop work to harness him up."

The Doctor was studying a New York paper, and he called out to me as I set out to find the young wheelwright — "The weather bureau predicts a fierce spell of weather — a big storm coming from the northwest."

Slocum at the best was not a desirable place in which to be storm-bound. I hurried away and entered the wheelwright's shop. An old man at

Digitized by Google

a bench was working with a draw-knife. As I accosted him, he looked up over his iron spectacles with a jerk.

"Can you tell me where I can get a team to take me back to the Hotchkiss Farm?" I asked.

"No, I can't," said the old man. "I don't keep teams to let."

"But you might know of somebody who does."

"Yes, I might, but I don't." And the crusty old fellow resumed work with his draw-knife.

"I beg your pardon for supposing that you had time enough to answer a question civilly," I said. "I took you for the average human being;" and I was turning away, when a young man who was working under a wagon in the rear of the shop rose up and turned upon me such a frank and friendly countenance that it was like a burst of sunshine.

"Did you come from the Hotchkiss Farm?" he asked.

"Yes. There are two of us. We were taking a jaunt through the country afoot. There is a storm coming on, and we wish to hire some one to take us back."

The young man was a fine specimen of masculine strength, frankness, and good humour. His broad open face invited confidence.

"Is it important to get back right away?"

"Yes — rather. I shouldn't like to be left here over night, judging from what I have seen of your inhabitants."

Digitized by Google

The young man smiled pleasantly, and the old man said sharply, "You'd better stick to your work if you know when you're well off."

But without paying the slightest attention to him, his workman laid down the tool that he had in his hand and said:—

"I'll try and see if I can get you back," and took off his apron.

"You will not lose anything by it," I remarked. "It will be a great act of kindness."

"He won't, hey?" snarled the old man. "Mabbee he'll lose his job if he neglects his work for everybody that comes along."

The young man gave no heed to him, and accompanying me to the street, said, as he looked at me inquiringly, "You're the gentleman who is living in the Hotchkiss woods;" and he said it as if that fact had some kind of claim upon his good nature.

"I don't want you to lose your job to accommodate me," I remarked.

"Never fear," he replied. "The old man can't get along without me. If you will go over to the tavern and wait for me, I'll tidy myself up a bit and try and get you back."

I thanked him and rejoined the Doctor. It must have been an hour before my amiable friend appeared with a spanking team and properly tidied up. He came out a handsome young athlete in a tweed suit and a derby hat.

I said to the Doctor as we saw him drive up, "He expects to bleed us handsomely for this,

Digitized by Google

I dare say." But when we were seated in the vehicle the frankness and geniality of the fellow interested me. "I have heard of you," he said. "You have a fine boy."

"Why, yes," I replied. "He and I are studying the country and taking a vacation. You are one of the few interesting curiosities I have met here."

"Why curiosity?"

"You exhibit a human quality that does not appear to grow wild."

He laughed. "You must not take these folk too seriously," he said. "Their hardness is all on the surface. Under the crust they have warm hearts and are very stanch."

"But you do not belong to the order apparently."

"Oh, yes, I do. I was born here, and sometimes I feel afraid that I have outgrown my place."

"Young man," said the Doctor, "I hope you will not consider it impertinent if I ask you what your place is."

"Not at all. My place appears to be to earn ten dollars a week and support an old and crippled mother. Does that interest you? It doesn't look very brilliant to you, I suppose, but I'm not kicking. My chance will come along one of these days, perhaps."

"It wouldn't be such a good turn of luck if your civility to us cost you your job," I said.

"Oh, no danger of that. The old man would

Digitized by Google

have to shut up shop without me. The old man is to be pitied."

"That would be a waste of good material. I prefer to pity you," I remarked.

"Oh, that *would* be a waste," he said, with unabated good humour. "I can take care of myself."

There was a fresh honest naïveté about the fellow that was exceedingly captivating. For a village workman, he was surprisingly intelligent, but his ambition, if he had any, appeared to have been merged in a comfortable belief that things would come around all right in the end if he only plodded on faithfully.

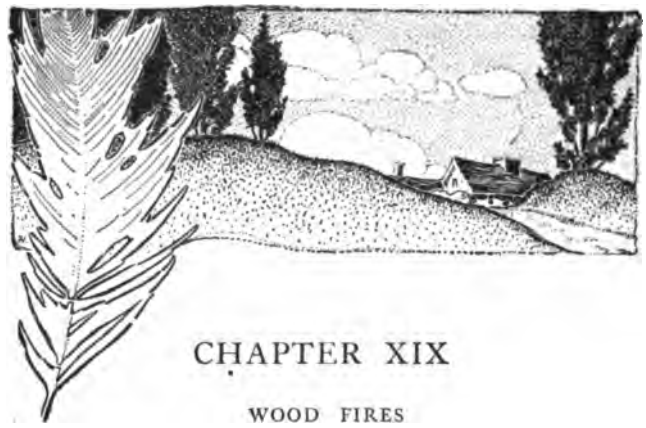
When he landed us in front of my hut, I pulled out a ten-dollar bill and offered it to him. He rejected it with a kindly smile, saying: —

"One gentleman can do another a good turn when it is in his way, without being paid for it."

Before the Doctor and I had recovered from our astonishment, he was gone.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XIX

WOOD FIRES

WHEN the Doctor went away, I felt like the prisoner who hears the departing footsteps of his friends and the shooting of the bolts. Now at last I was in for it, and no mistake. But there were some compensations and mitigations, and some quiet triumphs — flowers, you will say, in the condemned cell. I was to have access to the world by mail. The Doctor thought I had earned that by not writing a letter for four months. He promised to send me up a box of books from his own library, and I gave him an order for an ample stock of canned goods.

When they came, I got Gabe to put up some pine shelves in the cabin in the woods; and we spent one whole day arranging the place for the winter, tightening the sash, putting in a few shingles on the kitchen, fixing up a kennel for the yellow dog, and cleaning the chimney, — a task which Gabe accomplished most successfully by dragging

Digitized by Google

a juniper bush up through it to the roof, and precipitating an amazing mass of old birds' nests and egg-shells, to say nothing of soot. Then I helped him build a storm door, surprising myself more than I surprised him by my dexterity with a saw and hammer. When the roughest of the work was done, Griselle came over and added the finishing touches. She put a new curtain on the window, standing on the table to tack it up, and I holding the table. When she had fastened the chintz properly in plaits, she took my hand and jumped down like a springbok, and picked up the large photograph of Charlie's mother that had fallen on the table. "We must tack that up," she said, "where you study and write."

"No," I protested; "I'll put it away in my trunk. Photographs fade in the light."

"I should think," she said softly, as she pushed a tack through it, "that they would be more apt to fade if you packed them out of sight."

I was watching her, because she looked very pretty in her employment. Did you ever try to read or make out a picture, sitting in the cross-lights of a lamp and the moon? How the far-away beams confuse you!

She sent over a pair of old hand-irons that she had pulled out of the garret, and what with rotten-stone and ashes, the brass came out scintillant and added a continuous sparkle to the long evenings for months afterward. She even made a cushion for the big Quaker rocker, and lugged over two old conch shells and put them on the little mantel

Digitized by Google

for colour; hideous old relics I thought at first. But I learned the utility of them later, when my lamp was out, and I saw them reflecting the warmth of the fire like two far-away spots of sunset at sea with a dusky haze over them. I suppose the literal Doctor would have said that was just what they had been storing up on some desolate shore for a thousand years.

When everything was all ship-shape, and the first bleak night came, I fastened the oaken shutter, lit the student lamp, pulled up the cushioned rocker before the fire, and took a comfortable survey of the place. Upon my word, it looked quite cosey and inviting.

In all this I had followed the Doctor's advice. Just before he took the train, he put his hand on my shoulder and fired his parting shot.

"Don't forget," he said; "I've got a sort of contract to pull you up to a hoary eighty-five — or was it ninety-five? Don't frustrate me. I'm on my mettle with this thing now. I shall not live to see it, but you will live to thank me. When men suffer from too much light, we have to put them in a dark room, where they cannot see what is going on or read medical books. You'll come out like a beaver in the spring. Write as many letters as you please, but no business letters. Good-by. Write to me once a week. I can always reach you in four hours. But you will not need me unless" — and he got out of reach before he finished the sentence — "unless you want me for your best man."

Digitized by Google

I thought of this on that first November night, with the wood fire burning inside and the wind soughing outside. The yellow dog was stretched out limp and contented, broadside on to the blaze; and Charlie, examining the books, was firing questions at me like a Maxim gun. Was not this the real Robinson Crusoe thing of one's boyhood, once unattainable? I was not skilled in self-analysis, and I tried very hard to find out, as I stretched out my legs in imitation of the yellow dog, what the charm of it was to the masculine brute. Was it his independence of his fellows, or only the desire to be monarch of all he surveyed, and get away from the "church-going bell?" I had a sneaking suspicion, which I took good care that the yellow dog should not see, that at the bottom it was sheer selfishness, but as I said, I was not skilled in this unravelling, and so I gave it up. One assurance was much more definite. I had outwitted sudden death, actually pulled out his dart and thrown it back at him, and he had slunk away. Was this an illusion? No, the Doctor was right. Life was not, he said, an adjustment to one's environment. There he flew, in his usual vigorous manner, in the face of Herbert Spencer. Life was a coördination of self. Adjust your own triple natures, and the environment will adjust itself. I remember that, because I wrote it down at the time with a grim resolution to understand it if it took all winter, and it grew clearer as I went on. He had quoted Marcus Aurelius to me. "Life was the wrestler's, not the

Digitized by Google

dancer's, art. One stripped himself of superfluities, the other put on extra skirts and ribbons. In nine cases out of ten health was abnegation, not possession. Men could bloat themselves with life, and it wasn't comfortable." I had put that down, too.

Some chill things come out of the dark to warm themselves at those wood fires, and if they do not grow ruddier, they are at least clearer in the glow. It is difficult to say exactly what they are, they dance and flicker so. Sometimes they point filmy monitory fingers at you. Sometimes they stretch themselves, like the yellow dog, in slumbrous indifference, and sometimes they make you look behind into the darker recesses of the room to see if some one did not come in on tiptoe without opening the door.

A wood fire is full of liquid pigments, fancy-fed, and it has wondrous depths and recessions, like the sunset itself. Always a beyond in its soft turmoil of pictures, as if fire alone opened the gates of fantasy as it opens the gate of victory, and ghosts slip through.

It was pleasant, I thought, to see the little tongues of flame try to imitate Griselle with melting Hogarthian curves and fluctuant poses, throwing lambent halos, and dancing over beds of roses that vanished and came again aggravatingly; and if you watched long enough, sank into still gray heaps of ashes with little recurrent throbs of heat, as if illusions disliked to die like realities. Strange what fuel the reposeful mind will heap

Digitized by Google

upon the wood fire, and how the greedy flame is sure to reduce it all to a gray mass! But while it lasted, Griselle was sure to dance in it and float over it with line and colour, evanescing into some beyond with a beckoning incandescence, just because the insistent fancy, when it is in a yellow dog's condition of receptivity, will not rest at ashes.

Sometimes during these vigils, when Charlie had dropped off to sleep, and I was dreamily boring, with my imagination, into the voluptuous embers for a fleeting phantasm, there would come a rustle behind me, as if something had lit softly on the earth. It was probably a little gust that came under the door as the wind shifted. But in the dead silence it was like the folding of a wing. Once, and only once, the yellow dog lifted up her head sharply, cocked her ears, and looked eagerly into the shadows; but not having any imagination, fell into a new limpness and went to sleep again. That was all; and yet, do you know that such is the hypnotic influence of a wood fire and unperturbed solitude, that I could not quite divest myself of the absurd notion that all the ardent fancies that had gone up the chimney had spread themselves out ethereally and telegraphed something into the Beyond.

These *traumerei* were healthy and illuminative beside the dreams that I had experienced in the city, and which always left a waking shudder. They had come with a tocsin crash; and blanched faces, stricken with sudden terror, went swiftly by. Always a quick panic and mighty rushes

Digitized by Google

from impending doom, with the sudden kneil of mankind ringing in one's ears. These *fata morgana*, thrown on the screen of the sensorium in the dark, were always woven out of the rush and smash of the day, and were always cut off without a beyond. One night in the city the bang of the gong sounded; and in the twinkling of an eye, I was marching with a million felons in midnight darkness, shoulder to shoulder, — none of us knowing where we were going, but pushed on in steady tramp by the pressure of the inextricable. I did not get over that inscrutable dream for days. I carried it about in my consciousness like a corpse. When I met Griselle and discovered the sunrise, these dreams all disappeared. The Doctor said they belonged to the pathognomy of Wall Street.

While I was musing on that first winter night before the fire, Charlie, who had been asleep, I thought, half an hour, sat up in bed and startled me with an interrogative: —

"Papa?"

"Halloo, Comrade; I thought you were fast asleep. What is it?"

"What did the Doctor mean by saying he would be your best man?"

"Well, upon my word, my boy; have you been lying there thinking about that?"

"No; I was asleep, but I woke up."

"What made you wake up?"

"Nothing; I just woke. I guess you touched me."

Digitized by Google

"No, I didn't. You've been dreaming. Don't bother me with such intricate questions."

"What's intricate, papa?"

"Knotty."

"He can't be your best man, can he?"

I got up and went to the bedside and looked into the little ingenuous face, upon which this problem had dropped like a film of frost.

With the influence of the wood fire still upon me, I thought, as he closed his eyes, and I smoothed the hair down on his forehead, that all at once he was telephonic, — to be talked through, not at.

"Charlie, my boy," I said, "nobody can be my best man but you. You are the best and only. So don't you worry."

But he was asleep. He had delivered his message.

I stood there and listened a moment, as if I expected to hear a halloo at the other end of an ethereal wire. The little round clock on the shelf ticked audibly. The yellow dog had heard Charlie's voice and given two or three responsive raps with her tail, and then gone off on the same dream path with the boy. The fire spat weakly. The wooden shutter shivered a little. I was stark alone. I have often asked myself since if I was.

But that wood fire must have danced illuminatively through my mind when I was asleep. The last things I saw were the two conch-shells, like dull, pink eyes winking at me. Then that fantasy of the telegraph smoke began to weave itself

Digitized by Google

newly and take on new significances. The Doctor and I stood on a high mountain, looking at the human race. He had dressed himself in a Roman toga. He wore a wreath around his head and had a copy of the "Bucolica" under his arm. "You are permitted," he said, "to see the whole of mankind. Few men can grasp it until the scales have fallen from their eyes."

They were running about in all directions like frenzied ants, but from each one of them streamed a little silver thread, that like a fine ray of light went tremulously upward and was lost in the air. These myriad pencils intermingled, but were never confused. "What does it all mean?" I asked.

"That is the silver cord to the Beyond," he said. "Every man brings it with him and is fastened by it. You will see it brightest over the school-houses and the nurseries. Only a few men have been permitted to see it as you see it, and they generally mistook it. Wordsworth called it a 'trailing cloud.' Swedenborg said it was the umbilicus of the Unseen. Reichenbach called it odic force. It is only the chain of the Eternal."

"But what are they all trying to do with it?"

"Get rid of it," said the Doctor. "It hampers them. What they want is freedom."

"And do they succeed?"

"Yes. They work all their lives to sever it, and then they break the circuit of the Beyond. But they are free. It's too bad, for that is the only means by which the Beyond can communicate with them."

Digitized by Google

Curious it is what a psychic effect wood fires have. My recollection of this dream was rather pleasant. I don't know why, but somehow it seemed to me, as I looked at Charlie when we sat down to our breakfast, that some of the lines of communication were still open to me.

I tried to interview Charlie on his dreams. "Try and recollect what you dreamed last night and tell me. Think a moment and get it straight."

"Oh, I know what I dreamed about without thinking," said Charlie, promptly.

"Yes — well, tell me all about it."

"I dreamed that I had a new sled and the name was painted on it in red letters."

"Yes — and what was the name?"

"Bully Boy."

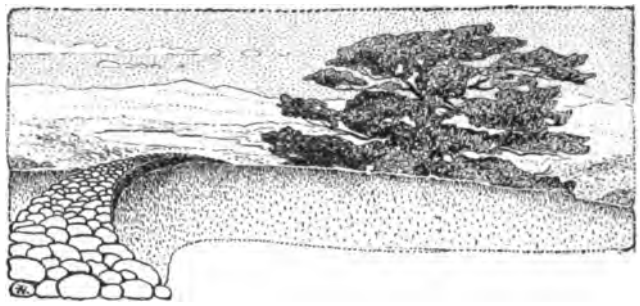
"Was that all?"

"No, I dreamed I had a new pair of fur mittens."

One thing seems quite plain to me now, and it is that wood fires have no psychology for small boys.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XX

HIGH WINDS

THE Doctor had remarked to me that man, relieved of woman's influence, always rushes off to some place where he can eat with his knife, and immediately sends out pickets to see if there is not a place a little farther on where he can eat with his fingers. I meant to prove, if possible, that this, like some other of the Doctor's generalizations, would not hold water, as we say. I had been for five months just a hundred miles from the refined restrictions, and none of the baser habits of the carnivora had made themselves apparent, so far as I could see. Charlie and I were as scrupulous about the small amenities as two dormice could well be. It is true enough, we had to play the part of scullery maid for ourselves, and come flat-footed down to washing our own dishes and shaking out our own tablecloth; for it is not to be supposed that Griselle could walk over in winter weather just to relieve us of

Digitized by Google

these menial duties. It was just here in the performance of these necessary banalities that we grew to appreciate her extraordinary superiority to them, and, to tell the truth, I think our appreciation of her had grown to that point where we did not want her to play the part of help.

Speaking for myself, it was interesting to observe how my consideration for her had outstripped the facts of the case, and how entirely oblivious she was of the growth she had attained in my imagination. If she understood clearly that I was an invalid knight errant, playing at rustication, and was to be humoured accordingly in all my freaks of isolation, she never betrayed it. She had placed Charlie and me under obligations by the most womanly assistance, but I dared not assume that she would not have done the same for anybody who had taken the cabin and proved himself a gentleman and a harmless neighbour. I had not discovered that this aggravating Florentine rustic, who had volunteered as our handmaiden with such an easy grace of condescension, discovered in me anything out of the usual run of her experience. There was an impregnable impartiality in her kindness that baffled egotism.

But now that our housekeeping had lost her supervision, we had to rely on our moral fortitude, and prove to ourselves that in the performance of a duty we were not to depend upon the allurements. It was a very old task. We were to face the gray days without sunshine; that was all. And the sunshine of Griselle was something

Digitized by Google

more than a mere figure of speech. It was a penetrative and pervasive fact that had gilded the humilities of our home, just as I had seen the sunrise kindle the furrows and emblazon the drudgery of the fields. Breakfast in a hovel had taken on, when she was there, that kind of sparkle one meets in the early morning before the dew is gone. She simply poured herself over it. A few magic passes in the little kitchen, some kind of sibylline trolling in low tones, and presto, Indian meal came out in golden chunks and was cut up by the alchemist into steaming ingots, and we heaped the butter on it and silently felt that it was driving the shadows out of us. The coffee was never so yellow when we tried our chemistry on it. It would not exhale. We did our best on those mornings, but there was always a little distress of human hurry in it, and we ran against each other and dropped things, and the yellow dog, distressed at the confusion, got between our legs, and I think sometimes we kicked at her. When we arrived at the vital point of sitting down and taking a long breath preparatory to eating, it always seemed that the preparation before and the rehabilitation afterward made the eating a little overestimated. But when Griselle had been there, we sat breathless and saw all the little contemptible trivialities of domesticity fall into line like so many dwarf courtiers, and results danced after her like so many notes under magic fingers, melting into melody.

Three, four days went by, and the Robinson

Digitized by Google

Crusoe thing was beginning to fray itself at the edges. Charlie and the yellow dog, having no manful pride in the matter, betrayed their deprivation shamelessly. Charlie proposed that we walk over to the homestead, he would like to see Griselle; and the yellow dog, when the confusion was greatest in the mornings, went out sometimes and blew her clarion toward the homestead for help. When we went off for our morning walks, I explained to Charlie that we had started the Robinson Crusoe thing wrong end foremost, and it was that which made it so hard to rectify. "What a terrible thing," I said, "it would have been for Crusoe if he had found a fairy on his island who made everything easy for him."

"Why, how could it be terrible? I should think," said Charlie, "that it would be just scrum."

"I mean that it would be terrible when she went away, and they always go away, Charlie, after spoiling us. We should have begun without one as Crusoe did, and depended on ourselves, and worked out our comfort with our own hands. That's the way brave men do."

"Then what's the good of a woman, anyhow?" asked Charlie.

"Oh, they have to work out their own affairs on their own islands," I said vaguely and conclusively.

So we took our walks away from the Hotchkiss place, and I did my best to make the abstract old mistress fill the void that the concrete maid

Digitized by Google

had evidently left in the affections of the boy and the dog, for it was becoming quite plain to me that children and animals cannot rise to the moral plane of heroic self-abnegation.

Those walks in the sharp November mornings with a child were, I dare say, disciplinary as well as sensuous. There were many chaste revealings in the frosty gallery of the season. Nature had passed in a few weeks from a painter to a sculptor. Her Fortuny trees were changed to Thorvaldsen statues. November on her exhibition days scorns any drapery but that of her own incense. The white flesh of the mænad birches flashed, marble-like, behind the solid junipers. I could see their beautiful limbs glistening far off on the pedestals of the moss, and the hills themselves, only yesterday wrapped in Indian dyes, were gray and naked. It does not take an invalid knight errant long to see that November, like June, is driving the wayward fancies back to woman. I do not wonder that some of the physicists have declared that the atoms themselves are male and female. If ever the amateur worshipper at this outdoor shrine grows restless at the anthropomorphic returns of his fancy to concrete Dryads, and rushes to the poets to escape from the earthly gravitation of his impersonation, he will plunge into a greater labyrinth than before, for the poets all steer their argosies by the sex-magnet. The invincible Florentine maid sails unperturbed through Tasso, and Petrarch, and Dante, just as she sails through Horace. Whenever you can get Fiammetta and

Digitized by Google

Laura and Beatrice out of the transcript or stop the cry for the "lost Lenore," you may go back to the Bassarids of the birch grove and feel that you are androgynous.

Pardon this tangent; the Doctor had only been gone a week, and I could not help thinking of that great actress's advice to an inexperienced and beautiful human crystal that had come to her with her aspirations. "How shall I create something?" she cried. "Go and fall in love," said the actress. (I believe it was Cushman.) Fancy the vestal astonishment of crystal art just in its first congealment. "And would you give that advice to a man if he had come to you?"

"No; men are always in love."

But with a boy for a companion, one has Eros himself along, unsophisticated perhaps by the Grecian myth, and therefore a delightful protection from the seductive ghosts of Nature, and one's stream of tendency. He does not give a passing thought to the Bassarids. He is trying every film of ice to see if it will hold him. He is the real chipmunk amid these eerie dangers. Keep close to him in the morning.

Some curiosity to know if Griselle would not come over as a visitor, now that she did not have to come as a handmaiden, would naturally take possession of me. I would be patient and see. She had professed such a deep interest in Charlie that she would certainly walk over some sunny morning and inquire after him.

I kept this up for a week, expecting every morn-

Digitized by Google

ing to see the Florentine vision breaking softly in the trees. But it did not. I suspect that the yellow dog, supremely indifferent to the principle involved, stole off regularly and had interviews with the maid. There was an air of satisfaction and placid contentment about her that was suspicious, and I wondered if yellow dogs and astral maids had a Volapük of their own. I have often thought since that I must write to Miss Hapgood and make some inquiries about this.

However, I enjoyed the situation secretly. Griselle was waiting for me to come first, and I was determined that she should make the advance. There was a soft chuckle in this, because it seemed to be on the edge of flirtation, in spite of all her splendid indifference. Ha, ha! I said to myself —if you were a truly astral maid, you would never have thought of hanging fire in this manner.

When it began to look as if my unchivalrous determination had to give way, there was a great hullabaloo one morning. I believe I had put on a white apron and was trying to do some kind of housework, when Charlie and the yellow dog and the sun all broke out at once. My recollection of it is that I kicked the wet white apron in a wad under the book-shelves, and galloped about to get my smoking-jacket and my air of indifference on, and then sauntered out with a fine carelessness, and there she was, coming down the woody colonnade, looking very trim in a new warm walking-suit, swinging a fragile dress umbrella as a walking-stick, very much as if she had been on

Digitized by Google

Broadway, the yellow dog turning the occasion into an idiotic Saturnalia, giving everything away with the most unpardonable looseness of demeanour.

Griselle's eyes sparkled. The blood was in her cheeks. She was extra aerated by the walk, and she really outshone, without knowing it, all the Fiammettas and Lauras who are paged and indexed. One or two degrees more of animal frankness, and I would have danced round her like the yellow dog. I strangled my exuberance and said with hospitable dignity, "Good morning, Miss Hotchkiss, you are quite a stranger — Charlie, behave yourself. Walk inside, please."

Once inside and *vis à vis*, we got out our foils. I sat with my face a little averted, for I did not care to give her the advantage of knowing that I could not help admiring her in her new shape as a visitor. Besides, Charlie was taking irreverent liberties with her, and I did not intend to condone her crafty familiarity with him.

"You see we are as comfortable as mortals can be without woman's society," I said. "Will you take your hat off and stay awhile? Perhaps you can stop to dinner. Charlie, take her umbrella."

She sat there like a handsome pincushion, I thought, for me to stick my absurd observations into, and instead of making any replies let me run on to see how much of a fool I could make of myself. Nothing in the world can be more ridiculous than to use foils with a pincushion.

"I came over," she said, "to bring you this

Digitized by Google

letter. It came last night. Mr. Minnerly brought it up with the empty barrels. I thought it might be important."

As she leaned over to give me the letter, which I saw was from the Doctor, I wondered if it was necessary for her to put on those six-button gloves and that exquisite little French boot to bring the letter to me. But she went on quite matter-of-fact like, "A week from next Thursday is Thanksgiving, and Gabe thought maybe you would like to eat dinner at the house."

I was about to thank her, when I caught that look in the corner of her eye. I must have stared instead, as if Shakspere's Beatrice had arrived. The very words danced before my eyes. "I took no more pains for those thanks than you take pains to thank me. If it had been painful, I would not have come."

"Gabe thought so, did he?" I said, beating a kind of mental retreat. "Well, I guess Charlie and I will rough it out together on canned turkey and bottled cranberries, eh, — Charlie?"

I began to think I was the only one with a foil, and that I was brandishing it rather absurdly. "Of course," I said, "it would be pleasanter for you if you had some company on Thanksgiving Day." She must have read underneath my manner that it only needed the faintest of invitations for me to rush headlong to the homestead, but I was determined not to go without it. I was master of the situation, and intended to be as obdurately cruel as the circumstances would warrant.

Digitized by Google

If she understood this, she did not betray it. "We shall not be without company," she said. "The Doctor is sending us a young gentleman boarder."

I got up, tore open the Doctor's letter, and read it.

"I am sending up another invalid to the homestead. I have given him a letter to you. He will amuse you, and perhaps convince you that a man can be a bigger d— fool than you are, with his health, and that ought to comfort you. He is only twenty-eight or thirty, but he has burst his hoops with too much life. Cultivate him. He will serve as a guide-post. He is good-looking, infernally clever, and trying to be, like yourself, tardily penitent."

I held the letter in my hand and looked at Griselle. She was bent over, purring against Charlie.

"Has the gentleman from the city arrived?"

"No. He is coming this morning."

"I beg your pardon," I said, "of course Gabe thought it would be awkward for him on Thanksgiving Day not to have a city person to talk to. I ought to have been more considerate of Gabe."

"I don't believe Gabe ever thought of that," said Griselle, "and I'm sure that he would not like to interfere with your and Charlie's roughing it."

She said this with a bland, open eye, the corner of which twinkled.

"Nevertheless," I said, "as I am under obligations to Gabe, and he sent you over —"

Digitized by Google

"But he didn't send me over. I thought your letter might be important. Is it?"

Here the twinkle spread all over her eye.

"Yes — very important, quite urgent, Miss Hotchkiss," I said, "I will go over immediately and see your uncle. Are you going back that way?"

All she said was, "Oh, dear, is it as important as that?"

But her eye discoursed, and as I walked over to the window, she added: "Perhaps you will not feel like giving thanks. Some people don't."

"The only way to determine that," I said, "is to go over at once."

It was one of those clear, crisp November mornings that make all the sluggish corpuscles leap. I could feel the pressure of the blood in my finger-tips. Such a morning is both a surprise and a suspense. It is like those circumstances in life which come with a flashing sharpness of peril, and touch all the senses with a new apprehension. We see clearly for a moment through awakening crises. There was an insistent and uncertain west wind blowing. My nerves shrank a little at first, as if there were peril in it. But it blew all that out of me, and I presently felt that this preluding of the cold was another revel. The blasts came like Gargantuan gusts of laughter, and made Griselle hold her hat on with both hands, and it wrapped her frock about her with a satyr's rudeness and a sculptor's skill. But she only laughed, as if heaven were romping with

Digitized by Google

her; and I admired with unspeakable wonder the streaming and fluttering arabesques with which she answered to the wind, blow for blow, grace against rudeness, converting the jolly old beast into a willing artist, as if beauty after all had more resisting power than strength. The fact is, beauty was better acquainted with the marauder than I was. Her resiliency gave way to his bluster, while I planted my feet wide apart and braced myself against him, making him howl with derision at my Ajax defiance. It was a field-day with the elements, and they were playing a lusty game of atmospheric bowls, in which the robust natures joined; and I have to confess that I for the first time was taught so to regard it by the dog, the boy, and the maiden, — each one of them coming into the wrestle with a responsive exultation that was new to me.

When we reached the brow of the hill where there was a fringe of leafless timber, we stood awhile to see an entirely new sport that I had never dreamed of. It was the collie winds shepherding the dead leaves. Whew, with what mad sportiveness they went at it! Along the edge of the timber the whole flock had been herded in an enormous bank, and there they leapt and danced with restless mischief, in an invisible pen, every one of them quivering with a desire to escape, and the dogs of the air baying at them with shrill delight, and racing after them as they broke loose and went streaming out like a flight of birds, and rising in riotous swirls, to round them

Digitized by Google

all up and land them back again pantingly for a fresh dash.

Into this charivari the dog threw herself with what to us was reckless spontaneity. The wind blew her sideways, as she tried to obey the pack above, bent down her tiller, so that she could not make short turns, but she kept pace somehow with the cohorts, sometimes lost entirely to view; and coming back along the home stretch to disappear utterly in the great bank, where we heard her muffled barking, and occasionally saw her tail sticking out and working like a semaphore. While we stood there, not more than half a score of the million leaves got away into utter freedom, and it was absurd to see how little they knew what to do with their freedom when they obtained it. The silly things tried to roost in the trees, as they had seen the birds do, and the sullen old limbs shook them off and seemed to say to them, "Oh, be quiet; when you have seen as much of this as I have, you will not get into such a twitter over it." I had seen the same thing among human beings who were all rounded up the same way by invisible forces; but, of course, it did not occur to me then that it would have made a good Addisonian article for the *Spectator*.

As we came over the crest into the wood, the revel went on above us. We could see the tops of the oaks and chestnuts over our heads bending and swaying and writhing, and here and there a stray leaf was swirling away high up in solitary

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google



I WALKED IN ANOTHER DIRECTION AND BAWLED OUT A STANZA OF "THE BRAVE OLD OAK."

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

freedom. We had come out of the game into gray peace with "sunny spots of greenery," where the moss was still lush, and Griselle sat down on the root of a beech tree, and smilingly pretended to adjust the awryness of Charlie's hair and apparel; but as she kept him in front of her, I suspected that she wished to adjust herself, so I walked in another direction, and bawled out a stave of "The Brave Old Oak," one of Charlie's favourite songs, while he, with the example of the wind still before him, tried to get her to bowl after him as if he were a leaf.

Give any man of my age trees enough, I care not what the season may be, and in half an hour he will create a Rosalind to fit them, and if he has a jack-knife, he will carve her name in the bark. I suppose Nature is always trying to be Shaksperian, even in her sly moments; certainly it looks like it to a man of sensibility, and it is in her interludes that she approaches nearest to her human master. Always Shakspere stepped out of the gusts of human passion to lilt. You feel his muscles relax and his wing unfold. It is when his muse pushes the playwright aside and touches the strings herself that you listen hushed. The gusts go by overhead, and he stops before Duncan's castle to pay a tribute to the "temple-haunting martlet," or drags Hamlet out of his whirlwind to the window to eulogize the "brave o'erhanging firmament."

De Quincey spent a great deal of analytic talent upon the interruption of "the knocking at

Digitized by Google

the gate" in Macbeth, as if it were unique. But there is not a tragedy of Shakspere's in which the winds do not hold their breath while he taps on the windows of your soul. These little interludes "have nothing to do with the case" in a dramatic sense. They are the divine irrelevance of Nature herself who moves by surprises and not by precedent.

My Daphne would not have been so vivid if she had not come out of the gusts. She sat there against the grays and the browns of the despoiled wood, making an interlude that must have gone racing off like those leaves into my recollections forever. With the Shaksperian mood upon me, I felt for my knife. I would carve her name in the tree. What prettier entablature of the event! To my astonishment the tree already bore scores of names when I came to look at it. Was she then the actress Rosalind, who sat regularly under this tree for all the actors who came along? In a twinkling she dispelled that doubt by saying, "Why, it's a beech tree, and men come under it in a thunderstorm and wait, because a beech tree is never struck by lightning, and they always cut their names in it, I suppose."

These November winds have a large winnowing benignity. They come with their brooms and clean house bravely. All the exhalations of the dead summer and all the off-cast clothing of the autumn are swept away. They hunt out the miasma, and descend like the Sabines on the hiding fogs. Away, all of you, begone! The earth

Digitized by Google

must be tidied up. They stir the waters, blowing oxygen into stagnant lagoons, turning over the tepid ponds, and shouting to the lazy runlets, if we can believe Lanier, —

> "Run home, little streams,
> With your laps full of stars
> And of dreams."

They are clarion winds, and they start the trumpets in you, if you have any. But they are not only frolicsome, trumpeting, housecleaning — they are supervising, regulating, policing, sanitary winds. They go through the woods with mighty scalpels. They tap on the oak to hear if the heart is sound. They cut away his dead branches ruthlessly, and bring down the bare pinnacle on the elm with a crash; they hate dry superfluities; they try every trunk and inquire about its roots; they skylark like Goths with the young poplars and birches, and if they find one careless and giddy, with little underpinning, ah me, they stretch her lengthwise sprawling and go galavanting off for others.

I wonder if some of those earlier confrères of mine who were wont to sit about the Parisian Parnassus in lofty garrets, and who wrote starry poems about Nature in the late and reeking hours amid clouds of tobacco smoke, and with black coffee for the muse — or perhaps it was absinthe — I wonder if the November winds would not blow the celestial fire out of them on top of that

Digitized by Google

crest. I cannot quite think that their flickering flame would survive the contact with Nature in this mood. But, mayhap, it would be the other way, and blow only the fetid and morbid fancies out of them. As I am not equal to the psychic problem, I might as well dismiss it.

This thought was, however, an odd premonition; for when we reached Gabe Hotchkiss's big porch, a glowing group, there was the new guest walking up and down on the sheltered side in a light fall overcoat, with the collar turned up. He appeared fragile, pale, and pinched. He wore a little crush hat and a monocle, and the hat was pulled down over his head to keep the wind from blowing it away. His hands were thrust deep in the side pockets of his coat to keep them warm. He was obviously blue with the largeness and atmospheric looseness of the place. He recalled in an instant the geniuses I had been gloating over. I said to myself, with prompt resentment: "What wind, I wonder, blew him hither. He must have the consumption. I'll take him round on the windy side of the porch and buttonhole him there; that will finish him."

After we had exchanged preliminaries, and he had handed me the Doctor's letter, we looked each other in the face and became absurdly sententious.

"Heart disease?" he inquired.

"Yes; and you —"

"Hyperæmia of the brain. I thought this was a water cure."

Digitized by Google

"No. Air cure. Come round on the other side."

"Who's the young lady?"

"Hostess, daughter, maid, Daphne,—anything you like."

"Not at all bad looking."

"Not at all, for a rustic."

"Understand you are roughing it over in the woods."

"Yes—trying to get all there is out of it."

"How much have you got?"

"Doctor says forty-five years."

"Good Heavens, you don't expect to live that long! What for?"

"To get all there is out of it."

"You must be of German extraction."

"Probably."

"Perhaps there's something in it worth getting out that I haven't heard of."

"Very likely."

"Picked the idea up in the woods, perhaps? Let's get out of this infernal wind."

"It will go down in a minute. Observe the view."

"Pardon me. You observe it. I'll get round where there's less of it."

I saw him turn the corner of the porch as if he were pushed from behind, and for a moment he reminded me of the yellow dog. But I kept after him relentlessly. He sat down in one of the heavy rockers, and just as I was expecting to see him cough, Griselle appeared with a rug.

Digitized by Google

"You'll find the air here much sharper than in the city," she said to the young man, and then actually tucked him in before my very eyes. I walked away. As she came toward me, I said between my teeth: "What did you do that for? He would have had the pneumonia in another half hour."

"How mean you can pretend to be," she said, "and there isn't the smallest excuse for it, as you ought to know."

"Isn't there?" I gasped.

But she had given herself that fringed-gentian twist, that I have already tried to describe, and was gone. She seemed to disappear through the kitchen door as if pursued by her own indiscretion.

Sometimes it seemed to me that Griselle blew through one like those winds, and set all the fancies scurrying. "No excuse for being mean," I repeated. But being Shaksperian that morning at the rate of thirty miles an hour, I must reason like Benedick, "That is to say, you are jealous, and need not be."

"My dear fellow," I said to the guest, "if I were you I wouldn't expose myself to this wind unless you are exercising."

"Oh, I like it," he remarked. "Don't let me detain you if you are chilly. This isn't a circumstance to the North Seas, and I've often sat on deck there when it was blowing what the sailors call great guns. It presents the happy illusion of something going on."

"I cannot imagine why the Doctor should

Digitized by Google

select such a place as this for hyperæmia," I remarked. "To a man accustomed to the intensities, that is, the activities of life, it must wear some of the aspects of death."

"I think," he replied, "that the Doctor referred to you as a remarkable example of the revivifying effects, and I was to follow in your footsteps."

"How fantastic! Mine was a case of heart; yours is a case of head. Imagine if you can the head following in the footsteps of the heart in our days. The Doctor must have relapsed into the Middle Ages."

"Not at all. I suppose the modern practice follows Nature and tries to divert a disease from one overworked organ to another that is not overworked, in which case the Doctor may have meant to relieve my brain by affecting my heart. In your case, the process may have been reversed, and in order to relieve your heart he may have affected your brain."

That was my introduction to the clever young guest. There was some danger of my getting to like him after all, for he was not such a dead calm as he looked.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XXI

INDIAN SUMMER

THERE are some laggard days in November that have been left behind by the autumnal procession. They are wayward, dilatory, irrelevant days, and come in the rear of the retreating season, like indolent nymphs that, dressed for the nuptials, only arrived for the funeral, and could not abandon their voluptuous moods. They wear their bridal veils, and look at us reminiscently through clouds of mist. These beautiful, dreamy days appear to have been thrown off somewhere like fragments by the revolving August, and they come along like the Leonids, and as softly disappear. We call them the Indian summer.

Sometimes, when there is a group of them hand in hand, they re-create for us in a brief way and vaporously the delights of the early fall, as if the atmosphere had a memory and could, like ourselves, summon lost hours. They blow zephyrously from the west and south; bring masquerading

Digitized by Google

showers, amateurish, with mimetic flashes and imitative peals, that remind you of the children playing at Shaksperian declamation.

It is interesting to observe how these calendar sirens beguile animate and inanimate things, here and there. Always there will be a robin or two that make their appearance, and try to get up a nidifying twitter. They are the unconventional fellows that probably laughed to scorn the absurd migratory instincts of the common flock, and rejected all the worn-out traditions of winter and the illusions of another and warmer clime. Fine, rationalistic birds these, that are not moved by vague intuitions, but wait for the evidence of the senses, and a great deal of exultant, self-satisfied peeping and "chortling" they do when this mirage of the Indian summer hangs in the air.

There are similarly disposed peach and apple trees scattered about, that show independence of tradition in their own way. They break out in blossom in November, and do their best to load the air with a spring perfume. They probably think (there is no other word but "think" for me to use when speaking of a tree's volitions) that the curious observers are admiring their independence, and never for a moment suspect that those observers are regarding them as "freaks." Charlie says he saw a woodchuck sitting on his haunches under an apple tree, with a winter apple in his paws, eating it, kangaroo fashion, in this sympathetic sunshine, instead of attending to his ordained hibernating business; and as I sat at my table, the

Digitized by Google

warm ray stirred some flies and wasps out of obscurity into crawling and buzzing impertinence.

For all I know, Nature may be a humourist and have her Mark Twain moods. I dislike, however, to think of her as a practical joker. It invites the suspicion that one has been reading Heine, and taken him seriously. And yet, when Nature wrung the neck of the robin she had beguiled, and ravaged the peach tree ruthlessly, scattering its confident blossoms and freezing its misplaced sap with sardonic sport, I thought I detected an Aristophanic laugh.

Nature, I am forced to confess, is no laughing matter to the man who dares to consider. (To considerate is to look to the stars. To desiderate is to want the earth.) I have a haunting recollection that Goethe somewhere says that the severity of Nature is an exact counterpart of the severity of the Jewish Jehovah. But, whether he meant that the Jews got their God out of the terrors of the universe, or meant only that physical facts corroborate what the Jews held to be revelation — I do not at this moment know. But this I know. It will not do to come to the measurement of the great scheme with one's sensibilities only. There are some vast chasms in the universe, for which our nerves have no plummets. They swim with *ignes fatui* that oppress a Heine, but that, to the brave vision of a Martineau or a Pressensé, open like the milky way, and disclose worlds.

As a rule, a man does not look askance at his sensibilities till he passes his fortieth year, and then

Digitized by Google

he begins to perceive that he has Indian summers in his bones, and does not quite know if he at times be not separated from his season. These lassitudes of maturity, when a man parts his hair in the middle, but exposes the frost on his temples, and mistakes the harking back of the senses for a new season, are his Indian summers. He ought to be very wary of them. His imagination is very apt to break out in blossom, and his recollections twitter and peep, as if winter were a myth or a mere creed. You see that intimacy with outdoors has its introspections and suspicions. Even a hysterical peach tree sets you pondering. Given a few pulses of the convalescence that abides in the external world, and I do not see how a man in a hut can help becoming more or less of a Thoreau or a Montaigne — not that they are at all alike, for dear old Montaigne always reminds me of a large cup of English breakfast tea, in which milk and water make copiousness take the hue of stimulation.

Nevertheless, there was the amber day, calling with an imitative croon, very much like a dowager trying a lullaby. One must dance like a cobra to these zithers, whether he will or not. Charlie and I set out for one of those indeterminable rambles which were always deliciously like reading Henry James, for they led nowhere, but enticed us with the suave glory of going.

The atmosphere was like a great piece of copal, its brilliancy slightly thickened to a slumberous translucence; that kind of voluptuousness that

Digitized by Google

you have felt but not seen in Stamboul coming through aggravating veils. The air was like children's kisses and as sweetly cogent as a mother's prayer is to an infant that does not understand one word of it. There was a tantalizing humid balm in it that suggested rainbows. Some involutions of smoke over distant fields, where the brush was burning, refused to leave the earth and hung in vaporous flirtation about the figurante hills. A few far-off crows, low down, swam like motes in our eyes, and where the western horizon rounded itself in a curved sky-line against a specially deep gap of distance, there was a reflected light as if from a hidden sea. I felt sure the waves were curling there on sandy beaches, and be hanged to the geography. I said to myself: —

> "Though inland far we be,
> Our souls have sight of that immortal sea."

Immediately, Heine somewhere in me whispered that Wordsworth was sure to come across the disk of one's mood at such times, like these crows. An assertion that somebody else in me — who it was I do not know — promptly resented, because the crows do not fly high enough —

> "To see the children sporting on the shore
> And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

Charlie broke in on this reflection with his usual irrelevancy. "It is just like Sunday,"

Digitized by Google

he said. I called his attention to the tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil in the far-away village. It came on the pulses of the south wind, an infinitesimal point of sound, rhythmic and elfin-like. "The world is hard at it, my boy," I replied, "but it is Sunday with outdoors. I guess the sky is at its prayers." That seemed to him to have an element of exaggeration rather than of poetry in it, for he took on an incredulous smile and said, "Oh, I don't believe the sky has to pray like we do." And standing corrected, what could I do but say: "Right you are, Comrade, it doesn't have to — That's just it."

I wondered to myself how it would do to have Charlie annotate Heine for private use. What jolly footnotes, with dispelling laughs in them, and jocund but shattering shouts of young faith. Such an edition of Heine, you will say, would remind you of the old tombs that were garnished with meaningless cherubs. But why not say, rather, the old tombs that had Rosicrucian tapers set round them, that did not go out?

The hours on such mornings are noiseless. The unctuous sunshine seems to lubricate time itself, and the diurnal machinery makes no sound. The ongoing nymphs are softly sandalled. Now and then one trips in the dead leaves, and you hear a sly stir, as if she had swept her drapery up, but you see nothing, and if you listen for a footfall — only the low breathing of the drowsy earth and a cricket here and there ticking the transitions.

Digitized by Google

Neither the boy nor the yellow dog could understand why I should sit down and moon over this. One of them had a neighbouring butternut tree in his eye, and could not for the life of him see why we should stop and keep still, when one could throw sticks and stones into the trees at the crows' nests, and run his hands diligently under the dead leaves for the butternuts. The other member of the group stood with her tail slightly curled and vibratory with expectation, and one paw held up tentatively, as if this idle suspense could not last much longer. Both of them had more resisting power than I had. At all events, they were not burdened with similitudes, and as a consequence could radiate the influences instead of absorbing them as I did, and rolling them over under my tongue. To them the conditions were sufficient unto themselves. To me they were inadequate, like a wandering melody that does not reach the keynote. Then it was that Griselle appeared, coming over the rustic field, glinting between the cedars, now lost behind the clumps, and now fluttering out nearer on, her courier gladness coming ahead of her, and waking yaps and yahoos and giving even me a rising pulse. Charlie and the dog took it as part of the morning's happenings, while I, miserable culprit that I am, knew that she would come that way.

Some years have gone by since that Indian summer morning, but I am unable to say, after all that has intervened, that I should have been

Digitized by Google

ashamed of myself. You see that the man trained to study, and if possible to "do," the other fellow, is baffled when he comes to take a hand at doing himself. The other fellow presents the advantage of always being in the singular, whereas there are two or three of yourselves that take you in relays. But, to tell the truth, I do not know that there was any moral aspect of the case presented to the group of me. I probably ambled collectively very much like the yellow dog. As I bring back the circumstances in all their dreamy cajolement, I appear to have given way to the evanescent enchantment more like an instinctive goat than a composite and calculating fellow. To be able to feel again at forty-four that elation of the senses which belongs to youth; to believe once more that everything comes your way because you want it, and to spin all the realities that swim before you into ideal tissues, — this is to become intoxicated with one's own blood, and once you begin to reel with that old ichor of the gods, you no longer are able to see that you are in one world, and the deceptive circumstances in another.

The boy and the dog ran to meet Griselle as if even they had an intuition that she completed the tune that the morning was trying to sing, and they danced round her with what, centuries ago, was called a "glad noise." She stood a moment with her dress lifted and her head up, accepting the fantastic homage as a matter of course, but trying to look astonished that she should have

Digitized by Google

encountered us. Where she was going, or why she should be going at that particular hour, I do not to this day know. When these things are arranged for us by a benign morning, why ask questions? My impression at the time was that the hour could no more help flowering into Griselle than a turn of the earth can help bringing the sunrise; and after that, anything was possible. If the birches tried to make triumphal arches for her as she passed under, and the dotard oaks pulled the few leaves they had left over their bald heads as she leaned against their trunks, it was all as probable and natural as anything can be in a dream. I was not even surprised when, as she was looking for sweet-flag along the edge of a marsh, the vapours, in league with the sun, tried to make halos and spin them round her jaunty Scotch cap. I accepted the girl implicitly as part of the *mise en scène*, but as one in dreams often has a lurking suspicion that it is a dream, I found myself at times saying, "Go slow, old fellow, you are under a spell." It would have astonished her, I dare say, if she could by some necromancy have seen the several of me whispering and consulting and comparing notes, like the conspirators in a comic opera. I said, "Easy, easy, my friend" (fancy one calling himself his friend; this is the meridian of moon madness), "she is only a comely rustic; you are spending a fortune of fancies on her. If you cannot be reasonable, at least be economical." But such bleak considerations fell like the butternuts and were lost in the leaves.

Digitized by Google

There was an echo somewhere in the woods, and we rang all the changes on it. I shouted "Griselle" at the top of my voice, to hear the taunt come back "sell, sell." But even that monitory sibyl did not move me. Wrought upon by the Indian incantation, I refused to reflect and only exulted.

It must be a very white magic that can so whelm a man and make the various trivialities of a day's vagabondage take on such hues and melt so sunningly into illusions. I called her Griselle with an easy zest, as if my mouth were a new beaker, and the word had new bubbles on its brim. It is interesting to watch a young tenderness begin to walk, especially if it has been creeping around for months in the dark.

She came and sat down beside me, flushing and radiant, on a buttonball trunk that the lightning had felled during the summer, and the wounds of which had been covered by a Samaritan creeper. She was not a foot away from me. I had felt her fan the warm odorous air, loaded with the burnt incense of the leaves, as she came toward me, and yet I was suddenly conscious of some kind of chasm between us that no words I could think of would bridge. In the first place, these languorous episodes have no vocabulary — only barks, and yaps, and peeps. I think the Indian summer would have us sit mute and breathe hard. It certainly does its best, when you pass the vestibule, to inebriate you with strange distillations. I have tasted the calamus across several years.

Digitized by Google

"It is a beautiful and dreamy day," I said platitudinously enough. "But it cannot be half so beautiful to you, who are familiar with Nature, as to me. I have been in a sort of Oriental swoon ever since I came out."

"It's a weather-breeder, according to Uncle Gabe," said Daphne, with her two hands at the back of her hair.

"It reminds me of a day I spent at Capri, and ate raspberries and white figs, and drank wine that smelled of violets. It is a magical isle; one can never get it out of his memory."

"And this Indian summer reminds you of it, you say?"

"Why, yes. I met a beautiful woman there."

"And she died, didn't she?"

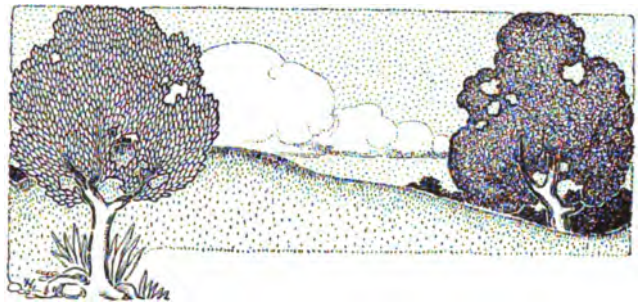
"No — she's alive yet. I met her in my fancy."

"Oh. Gabe says there's a nor'easter coming to fill up the ponds. I guess this is the last of the pleasant days."

"I hope not," I said. "Only the last of the Indian summer. After all, the weather has very little to do with one's feelings."

And then there came a soft sigh from the marsh, with the floss of the cattails spinning in it, and it seemed to say to me, reproachfully, "What a liar you are."

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XXII

TRAILING JUNIPER

WHATEVER may be the case with youth, I am satisfied in my own mind that the mature man does not "fall in love." You might as well speak of falling in gambling or in gluttony. He glides in with both feet over a long grade — whether it is up or down, you shall say. Very absurd it is to a man of large experience to speak of love as a precipice over which he is liable to tumble inadvertently in the twinkling of an eye, and with all respect to the Montagues and Capulets whose "ill-advised affair" had to conform with precipitancy to the three hours' limitation of the stage, I think the ordinary man of the world wades in with much lingering deliberation, and in nine cases out of ten doesn't know that he is in until he is up to his ears.

There would be no excuse for my dwelling upon it if the experience had not been, so far as I could

Digitized by Google

judge, a part of the change which the Doctor called "renewing one's infancy," and which was attributable to my life for several months in the wilderness. I shall therefore be pardoned, I hope, for telling of my slipping into a condition of amorous sentimentality when I insist that it was altogether the result of a cleared vision. Unquestionably, I saw some things which I had never seen before, or if I had seen them, they were so indistinct that I gave no heed to them, and this consciousness of a rectified vision needs some explanation.

When I was a lad I had a grandmother, one of those dear, lovable old women of another epoch, who managed to make some deep impressions upon ductile minds, that were never outgrown, and which were very often impressions that should not have been made. One of her favourite phrases directed to me when my boy's heedlessness became very obvious was, "Ah, my boy, the scales will fall from your eyes some day." I was accustomed to hear that admonitory speech from the nursery to the school days. It was always said with a tender finality that barred all further speech. It bothered me a good deal, as I began to think. The only scales that my limited experience had made me acquainted with were fish-scales, and I could not, do my best, adjust the metaphor, if it was one, to the physical facts. I often wondered in my crib if men had invisible fish-scales growing over their eyes, which at some crisis dropped off. Then, as I grew older, and read the phrase in the

Digitized by Google

Bible, so explicitly given, "There fell from his eyes, as it had been, scales," instead of its being a strong Oriental way of stating a mental change, it took hold of me as a mysterious supernatural and physical occurrence, that was specially awful, and to my youthful mind specially cruel. In the first questioning stages of my growth, I wanted to know why a man should be blind so that he could not see the error of his way until he had traversed a long route. This after-problem bothered me for years in a metaphysical way, as the earlier problem had bothered me with its physics. But as I went out into the world with a lively retina that had all it could do to register the impressions that crowded upon it, I passed the puzzle over to a spiritual domain, as not being exigent or explicable on business principles. Still, as I have said, these early impressions, once made, pop up unexpectedly at odd times all through a man's life, as he encounters new experiences and learns sooner or later that his vision varies with his conditions and moods.

These quick and passing perceptions of an equable truth, lying just beyond our ordinary range of vision, are little apocalyptic glimpses that come to all men at times in varying degrees of vividness, so that I am not assuming any special faculty. It is as if a veil parts, and the eternal real is lying there with a strangely familiar majesty and calm. One could almost say that at such times our cognitions smite, or at least that we only come to the apprehension of the truth *per saltum*,

Digitized by Google

and without volition, paradoxical as that may sound.

When the spiteful and spitting snow gusts came, and an incisive northeast chilliness presaged Christmas glows, I sat before my log fire wondering again if the scales had fallen from my eyes. In the elf light of my wood blaze, with a great black tea-kettle on our crane, singing and tinkling its lid, I could almost fancy that my old grandmother was somewhere near, smoothing down her apron and saying, "Yes, I told you the scales would fall from your eyes some day."

Unquestionably I was looking at things — and not only things, but thoughts — with a simpler vision. Most of the disturbing elements of my life had been left behind. The emotions, as distinct from the feelings, were less insurgent, and did not ruffle my judgment so obstreperously. I looked out at the first snow with a reflective equanimity. It was, in a sense, a hysterical preludium of winter, as if the 'prentice season were flirting with us, giving us fierce dashes of flakes that drove with a blinding bravado, and then vanished weakly. Some kind of over-effort to snow, and not quite able to accomplish it, very characteristic, Gabe said, of the modern winters, that lack the gravity and steady, business-like effectiveness of the old-fashioned whelming snow-storm. Gabe evidently thought that the elements, like human society, had grown strenuous and discursive, and lacked prosaic continuity of purpose. "There will be a great hue and cry of snow," said Gabe,

Digitized by Google

"but it won't amount to much but wind. Why, I remember when we were snowed in regularly about this time o' year, and it was generally a week or more before we got the roads open through the drifts. We allers looked for it as a winter's holiday. Snow for Christmas was the reg'lar thing. Them was the times when this was a grass country, and pasture-lands kind o' took care of themselves."

What was it made me contemplate these homely affairs with a complacency that was — well, what was it — enervating or inspiring? I do not exactly know. But I was certainly at rest with myself, if not absolutely at peace. Something assured me that I had taken up a broken link and riveted it; and believe me, there is no achievement in this life so profoundly satisfactory as the consciousness of having retrieved something — of being able to stand with both feet in the inevitable and say, "No longer canst thou crush me, O ocean of the Great Necessity, for I too, with my will, am one with you." Then I would look at the round intent face of the child who was my companion. He would be eagerly poring over the books the Doctor had sent him, and as I stretched invisible arms across the table and enfolded him, without his knowing it, I thought with a deep wondering horror that a few months ago there was a great gulf between us, and I with a drawn face and blood-shot eyes was plunging with short breaths and heavily burdened heart amid a sordid mob. Scales on my eyes, forsooth. I must have been

Digitized by Google

covered with them like a prehistoric dragon. It seemed to me now, in the serene flare of our wood fire, that in those rabid days I had lit the torch of life at both ends, and was flourishing it madly like a firebrand, while this little shrine was left somewhere to die slowly out in darkness. At such moments Charlie would look up from his book with a passing wonder in his clear blue eyes, as if he had felt the invisible arms touching him.

When a man comes to this condition, it is absolutely necessary that he should tell it to some one. To arrive in a new world and find nobody in it is perilously near to wanting to go back again. The only person who belonged to this new world, who was an integral part of it, and had never heard of any other, was Griselle. The Doctor had coasted it, and thrown over some observations that floated about in it like bottles containing valuable memoranda, which I might fish up as the occasion served, but as for talking to the Doctor, that was out of the question, for he always did the talking himself. Gabe was only a statue, erected by the years, and one doesn't talk to bronzes, however historic. Charlie — well, Charlie invariably thawed out my statements into mere intuitions for which there were no words, and they trickled off into warm silences.

Not being a literary man, I did not keep a private diary for other people to read, and generally tore up my letters with a dull obliviousness of future biographers. Griselle was the only

Digitized by Google

person in this new order of equilibrium, who wore a shining air of perception and invitation. Always she seemed to be saying in a sly mute way: "Yes, I know, you have something to say to me that you haven't said, but it will keep. Wait." It is true the winter had kept her out of our little circle, but Gabe came over pretty regularly to us, and he nearly always brought a neat little bunch of her winter carnations, and there was something subtle in his bringing them, as if they said in spite of him, "Oh, he wouldn't have thought of it — don't you make any mistake." They were always delicate reminders to me, at least, that the woman's remembrance was fragrant.

Now, how could a mature man in my condition help growing sentimental toward Griselle? How could I help observing what an improved vision I had for trifles, as I watched all the shoots of this sentimentality, as they came out in small solicitudes and little jealousies? I wondered if she preserved her ineffable impartiality by putting carnations every day in her new guest's chamber. "I suppose," I remarked to Gabe, "that Mr. Cumberland enjoys a bunch of flowers in his room, for nothing takes the edge off desolation like flowers." "I d' know nothin' 'bout that," said Gabe, with sincere indifference. "I guess the gal ain't got pinks enough this time o' year to hand out to everybody." Sometimes there were tones in Gabe's voice, uncouth as he was, that were really quite human. Three months ago, I remarked to myself, she would have sent the

Digitized by Google

flowers to Charlie. That affectation has died a natural death.

It is not possible for the mature man to obtain this kind of vision without having some doubts about it There were times when I told myself that I had weakly given way to hallucination; that my ideal was the one-eyed person in the land of the blind; that my fancies, being starved, were creating phantoms. Very interesting it was to observe with what conclusive evidence I took my own part against myself, and fell back on my clear vision. Hallucinations be confounded. Did I know comeliness when I saw it, or didn't I? Did I have to send to the city for an *élite* directory? Was I such a dolt that purity, innocence, grace, and loveliness had to be stamped and authenticated before I could accept them? What was I up in the woods for if not for Nature? A nice poltroon I would be to turn up my nose at her best offerings.

The shortest way out of this was to take Griselle into my confidence. When Gabe came over and laid the carnations on the table, I asked how the young lady's health was. This was very much like asking how Venus liked the water. But Gabe only grunted out, "Oh, the gal's in pretty good shape. She's out somewhere looking for Christmas greens," and he trundled out to fix up our woodpile.

"Comrade," I said to Charlie, "did you hear that? Griselle is looking for Christmas greens. What are we thinking about?"

Digitized by Google

"I know," said Charlie, "she was going over to see if there wasn't some trailing juniper on the rocks. I'll bet I can find her."

It was not so easy as he thought. We traversed the woods, skirted one or two farms, and threw our yodels against all the rocks, before we found the imprint of her little foot in one of the thin snow flurries under the cedars. What a fine zest that gave to our search! I could not quite make out whether I felt like Orpheus or like a trapper. We put the nose of the yellow dog down in the footmark to give her the trail, but the exuberant idiot only barked and obliterated it by rolling in it, for which she was kicked. To know that Griselle had passed that way like balsamic winds was something. It reminded me how well she could play the lost Eurydice. Once we thought we heard her answering our call, and we shouted and listened. A faint mellow response came on the frosty air, but it turned out to be one of those other illusive nymphs that take to the woods and rocks and stay there.

Such a hunt only adds fuel to a man's fancies, giving to the object of his search an airy unattainableness that converts a Gretchen into a Psyche. Strange transcendental possibilities there were in rustic womanhood that kept her just one remove beyond realization, or even comprehension. Wonderful transmutations, when one's scales have dropped, as if ordinary femininity, before it is captured, could pass with fluctuant tenuity through all the phases of Beatrice, Rosalind, Viola.

Digitized by Google

If ever you would know with a finer sense than Cowper possessed, what a wealth of crystal delights is in a winter's walk, you must project a handsome girl ahead of you, just out of sight. Then only will your imaginings feel the real spur of poetry, without, perhaps, as in my case, the power of utterance. You come then to the edge of a great soft mystery, as if the amorous emotions and the physical world somewhere had a common starting-point in the serene conception of beauty. I never knew before how beautiful the dead tree trunks were. They shone with new colours; delicious sombres of Vandyke, and soft, dull terra-cottas, and deep sage greens, with splashes of bronze where the light burnished the boles. The vistas shifted and arranged themselves in colonnades and spectral avenues, through which the bacchante lights danced, and along which the stately cedars and hemlocks, tonsured by the snow, stood in priestly gravity, chanting a new gloria. Back of all this paganism of the mind there was a softer association, somehow emitting a deeper muffled tone of expectation, as if the minster bells of Christmas were already rung by the wind, and were reverberating through these cathedral aisles.

Griselle was looking for trailing juniper. What trailing juniper was, I did not know. It was probably a new order of the conifera belonging to the fairy domain into which Griselle slipped so easily. But the kalmia I knew. It stuck its green leaves out of the snow patches unblemished and undaunted. I think we called it mountain laurel

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

It [illegible] a wonderful [illegible] that [illegible] Compared [illegible] is [illegible] walk [illegible] some great deal of [illegible] sold [illegible] only with you [illegible] the real spar [illegible] poetry without [illegible] the power of [illegible] Y[illegible] then to the edge [illegible] if the [illegible] and the [illegible] some [illegible] had [illegible] [illegible] conception of beauty. I never knew [illegible] beautiful the dead tree [illegible] were. [illegible] some [illegible] of Va[illegible] and soft, dull terra-cotta and [illegible] greens, with splashes of brown [illegible] the holes [illegible] vistas [illegible] themselves in [illegible] and [illegible] avenues, through which the [illegible] along which the [illegible] cedars [illegible] tonsured by the snow, stood in priestly [illegible] a new [illegible] Back of all this [illegible] of the [illegible] there was a [illegible] a deeper [illegible] tone of [illegible] if the minster bells of Christmas were [illegible] rung by the wind, and were reverberating through these cathedral aisles.

Griselle was looking [illegible] trailing juniper. What [illegible] it [illegible] I [illegible] know. It was presently a new order of the [illegible] belonging to the fairy [illegible] into which [illegible] slipped so easily. But the [illegible] I knew [illegible] its green leaves out of the snow patches [illegible] and undaunted. I think [illegible] it mountain laurel



THE STATELY CEDARS AND HEMLOCKS, TONSURED BY THE SNOW, STOOD IN PRIESTLY GRAVITY.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

when we were boys. I had always thought of it wreathed round the head of Petrarch until now, and now it crept out of the snow patches and into my memory as festoons wrought by white fingers for merry days and nights, and specially made to throw back from its shining leaves the splendours of our wood fires. We cut and hacked at it, and loaded ourselves with triumphant branches, and set out homeward, leaving the invisible Griselle, with much reluctance and many lookings back, to go her way.

Can a man — I mean a mature man — be a poet in desire without having a pure and lovely form ahead of him, baffling him? I often thought afterward how fortunate it was that I had not come with my load of ideals suddenly upon Griselle in the winter walk. What stumbling foolishness might I not have committed! What wreck and ruin might I not have made of the unattainable, descending in one evil moment to melodramatic frenzy, rushing at her and shouting, "Be mine — be mine." Be sure I would have wreathed the kalmia about her and danced in my own moon madness like a destroying satyr.

It was much better for the ideal that she should shimmer indistinctly, and that we should hang the kalmia up like mistletoe in our cabin and wait. There was an airy gulf to be patiently crossed.

How old *was* Leander when he swam the Hellespont? I'll have to look that up. But what use?

Then the late rains set in, chilly and continuous.

Digitized by Google

They beat all day against our panes, blurring them with running films, tapping on our shingles with little bills, and sometimes reaching our wood fire, which spat at them like a cat. I had, in anticipation, dreaded this episode, but now that it had come, the dreariness, like the other discomforts of our life, melted away before a new mental attitude.

It is quite impossible for me to tell you why the leaden prospect, with rain, rain, rain, falling as far as the eye could reach, running down the tree trunks all day, and gurgling somewhere in spasmodic rivulets, should all at once present some slumberous depths that defied scrutiny, but that cajoled one's mood. I sat there before my fire, a veritable eremite, listening to a broken spout, and it reminded me of the oboes in some symphony I had heard. Perhaps it was the symphony of Beethoven's which Coleridge said was "like a funeral procession in deep purple." Not that the sound of the spout was at all like the oboe — but what was the oboe like, or the symphony itself for that matter? I have never seen a funeral procession in deep purple. I suppose it occasionally sweeps by on the invisible elements. Out of the gray desolate hours I heard Griselle saying again, "A nor'easter is coming to fill up the ponds." Must the ponds be filled like the granaries? Was this a harvest duty of the skies? It really seemed so to me at that moment.

What did men do when they were shut up by

Digitized by Google

the weather in a cabin? I tried to recall what it was Ik Marvel did on wet days at Edgewood. I may be wrong, but it seemed to me he had made very delightful criticisms with pleasant quotations from the old poets. He probably had a library at his elbow, and sat in a deep, cushioned chair. Was that not what immemorial country parsons had done in their rainy leisure, telling us what they thought of Chaucer and Marlowe and Landor and the author of "Greenland's Icy Mountains"? These rainy-day essayists were charming literary persons. What should a man do who was only sentimental and not at all literary?

It occurred to me that the proper and consistent thing to do was to go out and make the acquaintance of the rainy weather by personal contact. That alone would warrant an unliterary man talking about it. The proposition met with the instant approbation of Charlie and the yellow dog; the latter signified, as usual, that she had not the faintest conception of the nuances of the affair, and did not care a rap of her tail for the moral aspects of it, but was always delighted to be up to something that had no particular end in view. We put on rubber coats, and off we started among the trees, holding our faces up bravely against the rain. It ran down our cheeks in cool rivulets, and dropped off the ends of our noses; it came round the corners in the woods at us in sheets and swirling dashes. But we laughed and defied it. Nothing so clearly and indefensibly boyish as this had so far in my mature experience

Digitized by Google

occurred to me. It was like the incomprehensible bravado of the urchin who, when he gets a new pair of boots, wades through all the mud puddles. Still, there was a subtle delight in coming face to face with the most disagreeable days, and telling the season to her teeth that we were immune. It was not unlike the pinning of a ghost in the corner of a room after he has been shimmering and clanking absurdly. In such experiences you tread softly on new fraternities that spread out like unsuspected moss. The elemental ghosts that you have harboured give way to new and lusty friendships, and after you have wrestled awhile with Nature you learn that, whatever you may be, she is no sentimentalist.

We took a look at the ponds. They were swirling and roiled. We saw no signs of life, save a water-rat that scampered away bedraggled and forlorn. The bushes along the banks looked like very bad etching. Do our best, we were compelled to judge of the scene by our sensations and imaginary discomforts, always as if the performance of the work should have some reference to our sensibilities, and had forgotten to keep up appearances. A solitary cow in the meadow was lying under a bare, scraggly elm, ruminating complacently and utterly oblivious of what we called dreariness. We could see her flanks shining with the rain, but it did not disturb her. She had formed the habit of lying under the tree when the sun was hot, and she did not vary her habits with any reflections upon them, so long as the

Digitized by Google

cold did not pinch her. Two or three sheep were in the woods nibbling the sparse laurel. They had evidently not been officially informed of the dreariness. Some kind of gap there was between our sensibilities and theirs. What would one not give to be able to put their views of it all into our words? a task that has never yet been accomplished. They all talk at us in literature from our standpoint, and are interesting to us only by coming over into our domain and re-exhibiting our purposes and desires. Always the animal story is a ghost story to which the narrator adds his own feelings and desires.

Once back in our cabin, its cheery homeliness was enhanced by our excursion. We heaped the logs, fastened the shutter, moved our table into the glow, and began to hug our human delights with the old self-consciousness. Charlie put his hand on my shoulder, his face came very near to mine as we bent over the story of adventure, profusely illustrated, which I was to read to him. My arm went around his warm little body with an easy clasp. All at once some new sense of preciousness in the companionship — a fine drawing together of the nerves of consanguinity, as if the bleakness and violence of the hours had forged some new links, just as you have seen the members of a suddenly bereaved family join hands silently.

"Charlie," I said, "this is cosey and delightful. It only needs one thing to be quite homelike. Can you guess what it is?"

Digitized by Google

"We ought to have deer's horns and skins nailed up," said Charlie.

What a gap between us! I drew him a little closer. "No," I said. "Deer's horns and furs would not make it more secure and abiding. In the early days of man, when he hunted and killed, he learned gradually to come and sit down beside his fire and rest and hope. But it wasn't the fire, Charlie. By and by he hung his weapons over the mantle — changed them into ornaments — but it wasn't the fire. I think men would get tired of living alone together. There must be something else."

"I know," said Charlie, "more dogs, and a pony, and snow-shoes."

"Can't you think of anything else?"

He racked his imagination. "It would be nice if there was a circus in the woods, with monkeys and hyenas, and you didn't have to pay to go in."

Dear little ambitions, travelling their own round in spite of me! I gave it up, pulled him closer and touched his soft cheek, but there was some kind of invisible space between us, and I wondered if it would grow larger and deeper in spite of our clasped hands.

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XXIII

WINTER SKIES

THE December woods have their cordial aspects if one is not over-coddled in his sensations. We impute to them a melancholy of which they are entirely innocent, but it is our immemorial habit to hang our emotions upon all boughs, and then, seeing our own human desires flaunting like the washerwoman's linen, to call, as Shakspere did, the boughs "melancholy."

We carry the pensive depths of winter woods in our memories — they are within us, and so long as we do not utterly confuse the intent of Nature with the ineradicable sense of evanescence in ourselves, the melancholy may play its part wholesomely enough.

I can understand now that the trees, more columnar and sedate without their garnishment of chlorophyl, are like cenotaphs of the summer, and do, indeed, seem to the bereaved sense like "bare, ruined choirs where late the sweet birds

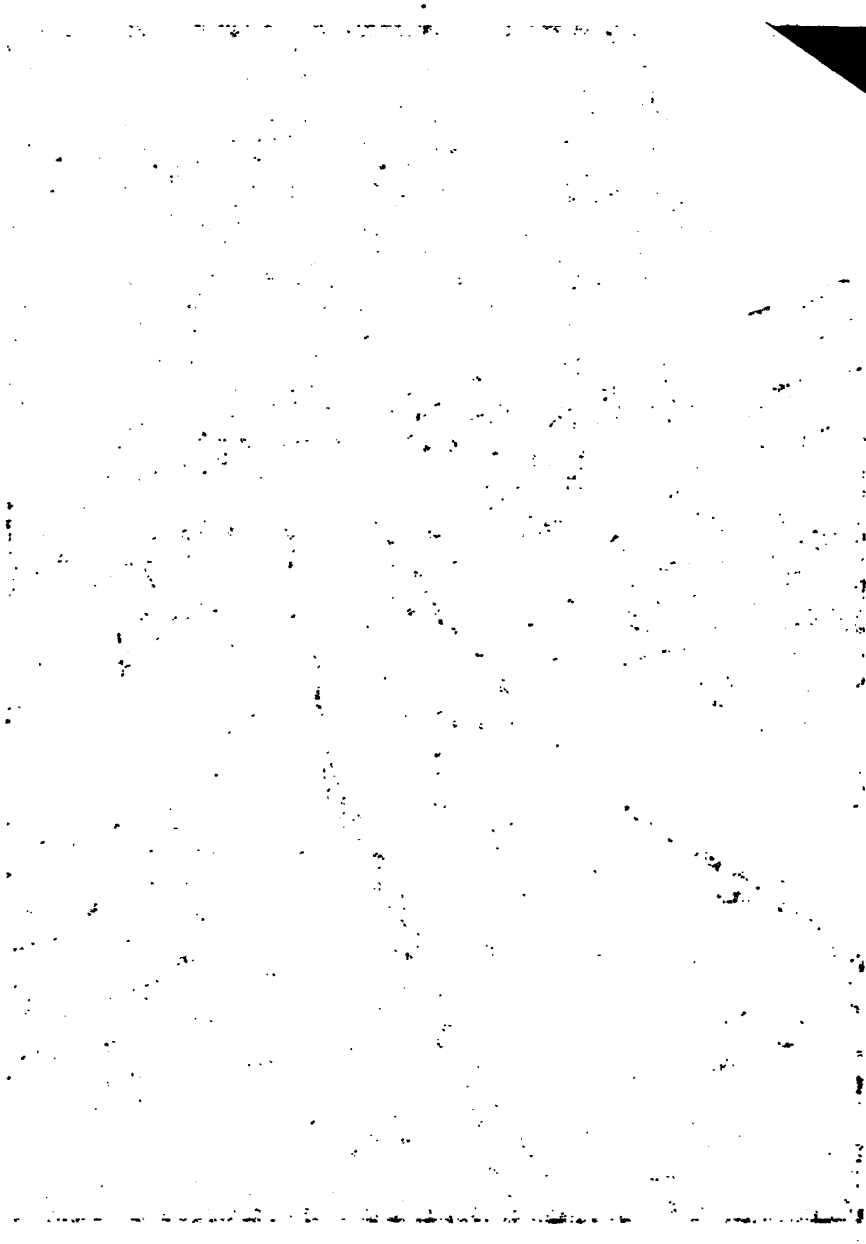
Digitized by Google

sang," and offer us newly disclosed brackets to hang our regrets upon.

The winter aspects of the woods are like all the other aspects of Nature when seen clearly and receptively. They are strangely akin to music in stirring unsuspected depths softly. The stark tree stems with the afternoon sun streaming through them — a deep yellow sunshine that had no warmth in it — were often associated in my mind with old hymns that I knew in childhood, gaunt inexplicable hymns that never should have been taught to childhood. And the winter sunsets similarly flooded me at times with an inexpressible sense of loneliness and separation. Why a mere deflection in the angle of light should strike an unknown key in the minor mode, if there is not an A minor in Nature herself, I cannot tell. Those winter sunsets were, by every measurement of the eye, pageants of exultant colour. But by the measurement of some deeper and not understood sense, they were sheeted ghosts masquerading in a bale light. All the crimson rivers of life that one sees in August were there, but they were clotted. The Isles of the Blest, floating in sapphire seas, were apt to reach out affrighted arms, and resolve it all into a witches' sunset with dun shadows lowering and vast bleak stretches intervening.

Sometimes the December sunset, seen through the tree trunks, had momentary mockeries of unearthly architecture and vast golden pampas out of which waved gigantic fronds, and about which

Digitized by Google



Digitized by Google

[illegible] offer us merely a closed harmony [illegible]

[illegible] aspects of the w[illegible]s are like [illegible] of Nature when [illegible] I [illegible] strangely akin to [illegible] [illegible] depths [illegible]. The [illegible] with the afternoon [illegible] [illegible] a deep yellow [illegible] [illegible] warmth in it — were often as [illegible] [illegible] that I know [illegible] [illegible] wrought [illegible] that never [illegible] [illegible] childhood. And [illegible] [illegible] d[illegible] me at times with an [illegible] of loneliness and separation. [illegible] in the angle of [illegible] [illegible] known key in the minor mode, if there is no minor in Nature, has it? I cannot tell. These winter sunsets were, by every measurement of the eye, pageants of brilliant colour. But by the measurement of some deeper and more subtle sense, they were belated ghosts masquerading in a pale light. And the crimson rivers [illegible] that one sees in August [illegible], but they were clotted. The Isles of the Blest, floating in sapphire seas, were apt to reach out [illegible] arms, and resolve it all into a witches' caldron with dim shadows lowering and vast black stretches intervening.

Sometimes the December sunset, seen through the tree trunks, had momentary mockeries of unearthly architecture and vast golden pampas out of which waved gigantic fronds, and about which

Digitized by Google



THE WINTERS ASPECTS OF THE WOODS.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

rose stupendous Il Capitans of agate and brass. But something whispered that over those cliffs had gone all the sandalled hopes and blithe promises into shoreless vacancy. A phantasmic sub-light gave it all a tone of irony that was like a faint chill, and taunted me with lost laughter and music frozen in mystery and silence.

It requires considerable courage to confront the ominous banners that we ourselves fling into the winter sunset. Men and women who never look into themselves without being frightened, run from the country when December sets her reminders in the air. We call it the social season, because we come closer together, and look into each other's faces, and try to forget.

Had I been alone when these thoughts were stirred in me, they must have taken on a momentary desolation; that kind of melancholy which has sobs in it, involuntary and unexpressed; we listen to them as we do in dreams, and they seem, as De Quincey puts it, to have swept the fields of mortality for a thousand years.

But I was not alone. Griselle and I were straying aimlessly among the trees, and my mood wore her as a kind of armour. We came suddenly upon a bright spot, no bigger than the floor of my cabin. It was vividly green, with a defiant moss that spread around in little hummocks, and was fringed by hardy ferns, and picked out here and there with the red berries of the partridge-vine that looked like drops of blood against the bronze leaves. Over it all poured the almost level

Digitized by Google

rays of the setting sun with what seemed to me at the moment to be the most desolate effulgence.

"It looks," said Griselle, "like a little old graveyard."

"Yes," I replied quickly, somewhat surprised that she should have seen the same sadness in it. "The graveyard of the race. I wonder why we should both have the same idea?"

"I don't think I quite know what you mean by the graveyard of the race."

"I mean that it reminds me that this is just what the sun will be doing when we are all gone and forgotten."

The tranquil look of wonder that passed over her face as she stood there, irradiated by the same yellow light, was quite childlike.

"What a strange idea," she said.

"Does not this sunshine make you melancholy?"

"Not a bit. Why should it?"

"I don't know, except that life itself is melancholy, and Nature betrays it to us at times."

"If the sunlight made me feel that way, I am sure I should want to live in the dark."

"I'm afraid we do live in the dark, Griselle, and the light only enhances the mystery. Tell me how it makes you feel."

"Oh, I couldn't. I never thought about it. It never affected me that way. Most always I feel like singing in the sunshine."

"Look, in a minute it will all be sullen and gray and cold. It hurries so."

Digitized by Google

"Why, of course. Does that make you feel bad?"

"Yes — a little. If it were only the sunshine, one wouldn't care. But everything else goes the same way and leaves us in the cold and dark."

"Well, upon my word, I never heard you talk so before. Are you afraid the sun will not come back to-morrow?"

"Oh, it will come back, but it will never shine twice on the same conditions. Everything else goes on, too, toward night."

"I hope you do not talk that way to your boy."

"Would you like me to talk to you as I talk to Charlie? I am very confidential with him."

"No. I think not. I am older than Charlie, and you have taught him to look up to you"

"Yes, that is true, and I couldn't teach you to look up to me, because in some things you are taller than I am. Do you know, as you stand there now, you seem to be looking down on me?"

"I do? Why, you know so much it frightens me. I don't really know anything."

"And that I find gives a certain kind of stature to one. There are some persons, Griselle, who do not know; they just are. It's curious, isn't it, that I should think of you in that way?"

"Yes, it is. It doesn't sound as if it were quite true."

How inexpressibly beautiful was the naïveté of this girl, listening to the ring of my rhetoric

Digitized by Google

and with poised instinct detecting the false note in it!

"But I want it to be," I said. "Let me be frank with you, and tell you some things."

"If they are unpleasant things, why tell them?"

"Because my life has not been made up altogether of pleasant things, like yours."

"Are you going to tell me about your life? Why should you? It isn't necessary."

"Some things grow clearer in the telling. You know I came up here by the Doctor's advice. He thought it was time I stopped living one kind of life and began another; in fact, he said if I didn't stop I wouldn't have any life to lead. At first I thought it was pretty tough. You see, he didn't tell me that I would meet you, and when I did it wasn't so tough. I think I should have gone back at the end of a month if it had not been for you."

We were walking slowly on our way back, quite close together, and I waited a moment for her to say something.

"Perhaps," she said presently, "that would have been the better way — who can tell?"

"And that does not sound as if it were true," I answered. "I am a better man than I was."

"Were you really so very bad then?"

"It looks in this light as if I must have been, not quite a reprobate, perhaps, but about as selfish, heedless, and headlong as a man can be. Try and fancy a man living at the top of his speed; short-breathed, in a kind of blind high

Digitized by Google

fever of excitement, too eager for him to stop, too impatient for him to consider, too anxious for him to rest. Fancy him whipped out of it all suddenly and set down where it is cool and calm and silent, and everything seemed to be saying, 'What have you been making such a clatter about? All that is abiding and precious in life was before you, and will be here after you, secure and unperturbed.' Then imagine some one coming into that still life who seemed to be the ultimate expression of it, as if the indulgent skies and equitable sunshine had said, 'We will do our best to help you on in the paths of peace, but as you cannot yet understand our language, we send you our best human product to say what we cannot.' I suppose it has been so in all dispensations, Griselle. Whenever man gets beyond the reach of the ministering elements, they send him articulate prophets and priestesses out of the wilderness."

Poor Griselle. She had never been talked to like this before. But was there ever a true woman anywhere in field or in palace who was not made to be talked to at some time in just this way, and who, unlike Gretchen, did not accept it all as the service due to her womanly ordination?

"I am sure," said Griselle, somewhat falteringly, and with her head turned away, "I was only trying to be neighbourly and social — it is quite natural."

"Quite natural, yes. That was the crowning glory of it. It was so sure to take its natural

Digitized by Google

course. You can understand that your acquaintanceship might become so necessary to me that I could not think of losing it."

"It never entered my head to break it off," said Griselle.

"But some intimacies are like fevers; they come to a crisis, and there is either a convalescence or a collapse beyond."

"It seems very odd to speak of a friendship as you would of a sickness. Why should there be any fever in our acquaintance?"

This was an allowable prevarication that we admire and condone in a woman who is in a corner and has no other weapon. The sun was gone; but there was a flash of his red light, I thought, in her cheek as I bent forward and tried to look into her face. It would not do to carry this indeterminate conversation much further, or I would begin to feel a pity for her.

"Griselle," I said, and my attempt to be explicit made it sound somewhat solemn.

"Yes," said Griselle, in the softest abeyant tone.

"You know what I have been trying to say, although I have not said it."

I thought she started a little ahead of me as if mere maiden modesty had impulses like masculine ardour. We were nearing the cabin. I could see the dull flicker of our wood fire in the window-panes, and I thought I heard Charlie and the yellow dog coming to meet me.

"Griselle," I said, "I have been making love

Digitized by Google

to you. I did it in a most clumsy way, but I want you to know that I would not have dared to do it, even in that round-about fashion, if I had not intended to ask you to be my wife."

She stopped suddenly and looked at me. Her eyes were full of water, and I thought she looked a little frightened.

"Oh, you mustn't," she said.

"Must not — oh, come, now; when you have thought it all over, and know how deliberate and sincere it is, you will be able to listen to me without any timidity. Is there any good reason why I should not at least ask you?"

"Yes — there is. I'm engaged to be married already. I ought to have told you before." Then she whipped out her little handkerchief, and it gleamed in the dusk a moment like a night-moth.

I stood mute. We were not far from the cabin. The door was open, and a red glow shot across the space in front like a patch. In it I saw the silhouettes of Charlie and the yellow dog. I think I called her "Miss Hotchkiss," and said something about begging her pardon, that must have been awfully unlike my previous tones. But she only said, "It's my fault. I'll tell you about it at some other time. You have made me so nervous that I cannot talk now. Let me go back, please, alone."

And then she fled away into the shadows. I saw her cross the red glow that came from my door, all her sylphlike beauty coming out sud-

Digitized by Google

denly in the last gleam. Charlie was there. I saw her bend down, put her arm about him, and kiss him. Then she melted out like a vision into the dull vista.

I leaned against one of the tree trunks, staring in the direction she had taken. As I recall the state of mind in which she had left me, it seems to me that it was chiefly that of acutely sharpened faculties. I heard a cricket chirping somewhere, and wondered if he kept it up all winter. I counted some of the tree trunks mechanically, and noticed how unchangeable they were. A heavy, musky scent came up from the meadow. I thought it was unnecessarily odorous. I looked about me to discover some evidences of change. But everything was obdurately unmoved, and a star glimmered through the branches with cold indifference.

Charlie and the yellow dog were approaching with noisy ignorance of any disturbance of the natural order. I started forward sullenly, saying to myself, "Here the Nature cure breaks down. What a farce it all is! Life is an endless series of metamorphoses, and those men were right who got all there was out of it while it lasted."

"What did you scold Griselle for?" asked Charlie.

"I didn't scold her, Comrade."

"Well, she was crying, and she acted as if she was sorry."

"Sorry," I repeated, taking him by the hand. "Perhaps she is."

Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XXIV

SNOWED IN

THE great disadvantage of being in the woods to a man of affairs is that he has no friendly distractions — no boon excitements. He cannot disentangle himself from the snarl of himself, cannot step out into external hullabaloo. That vortex which was always a near-by relief is gone. He cannot drown his conscience or his memory by taking a header into absolute calm. He is thus in danger of becoming an incubus to himself, if he is driven in upon solitude by the season. He is unable to expend his emotional forces along the lines of his muscles. As there is nothing to see or to do, the surplus energies revert to the centres and he goes up and down, as you have seen the carnivora pace their cages.

To make matters worse, it came on to snow. That promised imprisonment. Charlie and I watched the great flakes coming softly down thick and fast, and Charlie's delight became ironical, for

Digitized by Google

he echoed the very words I had used when in another mood.

"It is going to be awfully jolly," he said, "to be snowed in. We can heap up our logs. No one will interrupt us, and you can put on your slippers, and read me all the books that you promised."

"Perhaps," I said, "it will turn to rain. I don't think it will snow long. It is coming down too thick."

Then we stood at the window and watched it with entirely unlike feelings. "Oh, yes, it will," he said, with something like eager delight. "See, the hickory stump is all covered already. Maybe we'll have to stay indoors for a month," and he actually clapped his hands. I heard a responsive rap of a tail somewhere on the floor. It was a dog's way of applauding.

There was something accusative in that dear boy's gladness at being shut in with me for a month. Such loyalty as that, springing from a simple, satisfied affection, made my manhood blush.

"Charlie," I said, "I don't think it is snowing so thick and fast now. Doesn't it look as if the flakes are smaller?"

"No; they are bigger. Wouldn't it be fun if it kept on all day and all night? Gracious! it would be up to the windows."

"We couldn't walk to the railroad station through this very well," I remarked meditatively.

"Oh, yes, we could," said exultant young Faith.

Digitized by Google

"But we don't want to." Then a new thought occurred to him. "If it should snow all night, it might freeze, and then we could make snow-shoes, and go out on the crust."

"Yes, if it only would, that would be some comfort. Nobody can get to us from the farm-house if this continues for two hours."

"Griselle will come over sure. She likes the snow, and Gabe has got a jumper. She promised me a straw-ride as soon as the snow came."

"I'm afraid that she has changed her mind, Comrade."

There was some kind of fascination in the falling flakes. We stood there and watched them with an indescribable interest. The moment we stopped talking, the stillness of it all seemed palpable, and the silent spectacle of motion without sound was suggestive to me of unmeasured forces that I had not been in the habit of estimating. So thick were the flakes that the prospect through the trees was completely veiled fifty feet away. All that we could see were myriad fluttering crystals near at hand as they crossed the dark trunks, and the occasional bend of a cedar branch to empty its load softly upon the ground.

To stand still and watch the snow-storm with a wondering restfulness, and to acknowledge that there was in its silence some kind of inscrutable beneficence, had not been possible for me a year before. It had in it, in spite of myself, a dumb soft reminder of being once more covered up and tucked in, without words, by protective hands.

Digitized by Google

It seemed to me to possess an unhuman equanimity and to breathe into one a serene helplessness. There was nothing to do but to submit. I walked the floor in a brown study, coming back to the window at intervals to see if it were turning into rain, and to find that it was coming down as thick and fast as ever.

I must confess that I took it more easily than my mood warranted; and when, as Charlie had predicted, we were snowed in up to the windows, and the odorous smokiness of our cabin invited me to sit down and become as snug as a bug in a rug, and watch Charlie build railroad cars with Montaigne and "Robinson Crusoe" and Jules Verne, I could not help picturing what ought to have been, if I could have directed Nature into the proper path, and there was a Florentine maid sewing in the rocker beside me. This sort of reverie was invariably followed by a strong desire to get out immediately and plunge into the world, where I could make some glittering sensations do service for the illusions that had been destroyed.

I did not undertake to disguise from myself that I had made what we call on the street "a very bad break." It was rather humiliating to acknowledge that I had been fooling myself to the top of my bent with a rustic hallucination. But I did not become quite maudlin over it, and stoutly insisted to myself that I would easily get over the matter, if I could only once return to the habitual diversions and projects of a busy life.

That was easily and bravely said, no doubt, but

Digitized by Google

it only brought vividly to my mind what an incredible blank Griselle had left in it. And how was one to get out with the snow coming down at that rate? It is the easiest thing in the world to carry the flowers that annoy you into another room and shut the door. But it is not so easy to get rid of the odour they leave behind. Somehow that girl had grown tenderly and softly like a wild vine round my recollections. To grub up the whole growth and scatter its petals was at once a duty and a desecration. She was engaged to be married. Why had not my mature acumen discovered that in time? Why had she not discovered it to me as in duty bound when she saw, as a woman must have seen, how matters were going; and when she did discover it to me, — why the tears, and the nervous fight, as if she, too, had been drifting and had suddenly woke up to it all?

Still it snowed. The whirling flakes were piling up a barrier of reminders, — great banks of spotless separation. When we went to bed it was snowing still. Long after Charlie was asleep, I lay on my back dumbly conscious of an unearthly stillness, for all the entrances of sound were choked, and the house itself, which ordinarily had so many whispering voices, was muffled. The only lisp that gave evidence of motion was the sap that was stewing at the end of my backlog in the fireplace.

When morning came, we were snowed in and the flakes were coming down still, but finer and more dispersed. We had to stand on a chair and look out of the upper part of the sash to see the

Digitized by Google

result. To Charlie it was a supreme consummation. He had never before seen so much snow, and he had an impatient desire to get out into it. It made its presence felt in our cosey room in a manner wholly indescribable. We knew that the snow was lying deep over the whole country before we satisfied ourselves of it with our eyes. The sound of our voices had a muted quality. There was about us a new hush that suggested enswathement, and the atmosphere was full of nitrogen.

Such a situation recalled into service the Robinson Crusoe instincts. We were suddenly cut off absolutely from our kind. I had no means of knowing how deep the drifts were on the roads, but it was certain that travel must be blocked temporarily. Doubtless a rescue party would start out in time and try to get through to us from the farm-house. Charlie had a confident belief that we would hear Griselle approaching with the sound of sleigh-bells. Meanwhile we must wait and count up our resources. Fortunately our woodpile was handy and ample; our barrel of kerosene not half used; our shelves of canned goods still full, and there were several bags of boneless bacon hanging from the kitchen beams. "We shall not have to eat the yellow dog," I said with forced hilarity to Charlie. "But we must open a path or two from our doors. What was that? Something cracked."

"I heard that several times," said Charlie. "I guess it's the roof."

Digitized by Google

It gave me quite a start. I had not thought of it before, but that old roof was hardly able to stand under two feet of snow, and it complained when the overhanging boughs emptied an additional load upon it. It might collapse at any moment. With a great deal of difficulty I got the door open, for it opened out and the snow was piled against it three feet high. Then we tried to get the yellow dog to play the part of Noah's dove, but she utterly refused the rôle, and only sniffed at the white bank, and wagged her tail with the general significance of "No, I thank you, master." After much pushing and floundering, I made my way through the drift far enough to get a view of the roof, and found that on the northern side of the house the snow was piled up halfway to the eaves. Then it occurred to me that there was an unused hemlock board lying against the kitchen, and if I could get that on top of the drift, I could stand upon it, and with an extemporized hoe pull a great deal of the snow from the roof. I must have worked the whole morning at this job, forgetting for the time being everything else; pulling out old nails here and there with a hatchet, for I had no hammer, and finally, with incredible exertion, getting upon my plank and finding that I could dislodge with superhuman effort about five pounds of snow at a pull — and the roof must have been carrying about a ton and a half. Just as I was getting discouraged, about ten feet of it gave way, and sliding down, landed upon me like an ava-

Digitized by Google

lanche, knocking me off the board and burying me out of sight — not so deep, however, as to prevent me from hearing the joyous chorus of laughter and barks inside the house. When I regained the surface, I saw that where the snow had slid off, the roof was black and wet, and then I knew that the warm shingles were doing my work better than I could do it myself. When I got back into the house and had shaken myself clear of snow, I explained to Charlie what I thought at the time was a brilliant discovery. There was a wooden trap in our ceiling that led to the loft. I managed, with extraordinary labour, to get it open, and then we piled the logs on the fire. Never before was there such a blaze seen on a hearth. In a little while, it was roaring and spitting and vomiting flame out under the trees. "We'll make it too hot for the snow," I said, as I danced in front of the scorching conflagration, with a broom in my hand and my hat over my face, sweeping back the coals. We stood it as long as we could with our coats off, Charlie going up and down, fanning himself, and saying "Phew;" and the yellow dog with her tongue hanging out, backed away to a far corner. Then we took to the kitchen, and it was not long before we heard the drip from the eaves, and an occasional slide of snow, which led me to congratulate myself that the pressure on the roof was growing momentarily less. But no sooner had this relief come, than we became aware of a general commotion under our floor. "Whatever inhabitants are there,

Digitized by Google

are moving their chattels and families from the vicinity of the red-hot hearthstone," I said.

"Perhaps it's afire," said Charlie.

"Well, don't clap your hands. If it is, we shall have to move ourselves. Suppose you look around the surbase and see if there's any smoke, while I get a pail of water."

I look back at those hours now with placid enjoyment. We were snowed in for a week, but we came to know each other with an intimacy that has lasted through many years.

While I have been writing this, Charlie has come in. He is almost as tall as I am now. He came over and put his arm on my shoulder, for I called him "Comrade," as I did in those jolly vagabond days, and it must have brought back some tacit pledges that we made to each other when we were shut up together, and which I am proud to say we have never broken.

But to go back. I was about to say that the enforced solitude drove me in on myself with a finer scrutiny; and as that was, after all, the principal result that the Doctor had in view, I ought to emphasize it as much as possible for the benefit of all my brother acrobats and contortionists in the great circus. The Doctor was quite right when he said that to "stop" was little less than a miracle, and I now feel convinced that he drew me into this box, where I was compelled to "stop" whether I would or not. And there he showed his sagacity. Meditative as the snowstorm made me, I confess that if I could have

Digitized by Google

summoned a cutter, I would have fled with Charlie away from the vacuum that had suddenly come into it all, and plunged once more into the madding crowd.

One grows restless when he is forced to sit down with the ghosts of bright hours perished, even when it is before his own wood fire. It is too much like the temptations of those old saints, without their resisting power. Do my best, a Florentine maid fitted in between me and the flames, absurdly enough wearing the air of a "Lost Lenore." She beckoned from autumnal woods with a bunch of calamus. She came over russet fields, always like one of Canova's nymphs, and she murmured beside the still waters, "I would not live always," as if she wished me to understand that she was only a fleeting fantasy. But always to me she was a princess in disguise, and I was detecting her under her rusticity.

When a girl or a hallucination gets so braided into one's imagination, one is not going to take her at her word too recklessly and let her slip out of keeping. The tears—the tears, why the tears? Merely being engaged is not always final, at least with a girl or a hallucination.

At the end of five days Gabe got through to me with a team and a large farm sled. He had had hard work, and his horses were lathered and steaming. When he came in and lit his pipe with a coal of my fire, I pushed a chair over at him and tackled him, as we say, on a vital subject, coming at him bluntly and familiarly.

Digitized by Google

"Mr. Hotchkiss, your niece told me she was engaged to be married. Now, I take as much interest in that girl as if I were another uncle. Who's the man?"

"He's a young wheelwright over at Slocum," said Gabe, without the decency of hesitation.

"Oh, a wheelwright, is he? Honest, industrious, poor, and all that sort of thing, I suppose!"

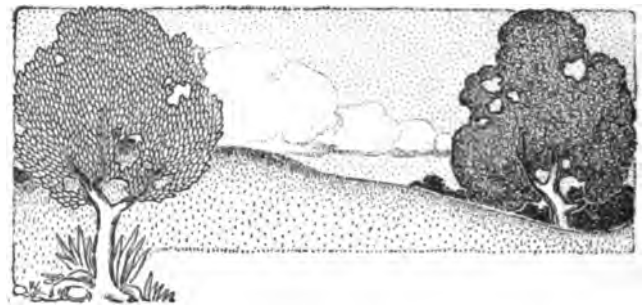
"Guess he's about as honest as the rest of 'em," said Gabe, "but he hasn't come to that p'int where he can make a livin' fer two. We're goin' to hev a big February thaw and an early spring."

Gabe's information made me a trifle desperate. "If you get to the village, I wish you would send me a livery team," I said. "I want to go to the city."

Then I walked to the window, and I'll be hanged if it wasn't snowing again.



Digitized by Google



CHAPTER XXV

THE RETURN OF THE EXILES

"HERE we are again," said the Doctor, quite like the clown in the circus, as he stamped about, shedding snow and overwraps. "You see, I defy heaven itself, my son, when you begin to blubber. I got your letter. What in thunder has happened to you now?"

I tried to laugh. "Genuine heart failure this time," I said. "But I did not intend to drag you through this snow. I only wanted to relieve myself when I wrote that letter. I had to confide in somebody. You will say I am a consummate noodle, and so I am, but the blow staggered me a little."

"The blow? What blow? Are you using metaphors or medical terms? Suppose you come down to the literal tomfoolery of it."

"That girl."

"Oh, ho!"

Digitized by Google

"Have patience with me. She is going to marry the village wheelwright."

"Christopher Columbus! and so the heavens are falling. Did you get me up here for that cataclysm, confound your lubberly organic pulp!"

"I didn't suppose you would come flying up in this manner. There's nothing you can do except listen to me; about the last thing in the world I should expect you to do. The blow has fallen. The account is made up. The curtain has dropped. Don't you want to take those heavy boots off and make yourself comfortable, now you are here?"

"No. It may be necessary for me to get away in order to be comfortable, and so I will remain prepared to fly in disgust, if this thing goes too far. Do you understand that I haven't wasted all this time with you for a mere diversion; that there was a great principle at stake; that my professional acumen was involved; that I was pitted against sudden death, and did not expect to be done up by a rustic petticoat? And now you write me that the jig is up. Have you taken nine months to make a monkey of me?"

"Doctor, you had better keep your explosion for the last act — it is always more appropriate there than in the prelude."

But I might as well have tried to stop that mill-race over at the dam with an apostrophe. He swept on: —

"You may have a right to smash your own prospects, but you have no right to upset my

Digitized by Google

theories with your nonsense, and, after nearly a year of discipline and moral purgation, to tell me that it is all for nothing, and you haven't learned a blessed thing. What have you done — killed your rival?"

"Yes. What else could a man do who has been taking the nature cure so long, and had all his natural energies at high tension, thanks to you? Do you know who the man is?"

"How the devil should I know, or why should I care?"

"It is the young wheelwright who drove us over from Slocum; that troglodyte of the sequestered hamlet has been engaged to the nymph of the air all along. The incommensurable is to marry the unessential. The ideal ends in a negation, and spirituality drops to spokeshaves. Daphne reverts to potatoes. Nature breaks off in a chasm. It must be plain to you that, with all your teachings fresh in my mind, I could not stand still and see this sacrilege without feeling that the ongoing, uplifting, and inspiring nature of things had been threatened, and that it was the duty of the purged man to become a rescuer, a champion, an avenger, a restorer."

The Doctor was pounding the fist of one hand into the palm of the other impatiently.

"Ongoing and uplifting pickles!" he said. "I had a faint hope that, if you became intimate with the ordained ongoing of some things, you would learn not to stick your Wall Street impertinence in between them. If you have not learned that

Digitized by Google

some things arrange themselves by primordial decree better than you can arrange them, then is the Nature cure a hissing sham, and I am a convicted duffer. You led me to believe that you could lift yourself by your own waistband above the animals. I was fool enough to believe it. And now you shatter all my hopes and smash your own peace of mind with an act of incomprehensible damn nonsense. Excuse my vehemence — where is that boy?"

"He's out there with the yellow dog, making a snow-man. Swear away."

"That is what you ought to be doing, instead of trying to make snow-women out of hot blood."

"You are right. I acknowledge it. But you might as well let me make a clean breast of it. It will aggravate you, but it will relieve me; besides, it will all come out sooner or later, and you had better hear it from me."

"Great Scott! has the ongoing got so far as a scandal, or a crime?"

"Listen to me, please. That girl came into my life with a thousand irresistible charms that were like tentacles."

"Figs!" said the Doctor.

"She wound herself about all the outlooks of my better nature like a wild vine —"

"Moonshine," said the Doctor.

"She fitted herself unconsciously to all the sweeter aspirations that you had evoked —"

"Laura Matilda rubbish," remarked the Doctor.

Digitized by Google

"She let me grow up to believe that she was a necessity of my existence — "

"Raspberry jam," said the Doctor.

"Then she told me that she was engaged to the village wheelwright."

"Well, I told you that three months ago. It was part of the nature of things."

"Pardon me. It was a glaring impossibility in the nature of things as you had taught me to observe them. It was one of those outrages that defy and desecrate the evolution of the beautiful. It could not, it must not be. In my healthful condition of mind, the wheelwright was a disease. I must meet it as you would, and remove it, for I had your example before me."

"Bosh!"

"I found him. I was deadly calm and determined. He was weakly frank and amiable. 'You love Griselle,' I said. 'Yes, I do,' he answered, with the bland innocence of a mollusk trying to scale heaven. 'You thought of marrying her.' 'Dreamed of it for two years,' he said. 'But you haven't accomplished your fell purpose,' I said between my teeth. 'I am waiting,' he said, 'until I can support a wife.' 'You must be aware by this time that you never can — such a wife, and that having wasted a reasonable length of time in vain hopes, you ought to give some one else a chance.' 'Oh, no,' said this Lothario of the workbench, 'she will wait ten years. So will I. Something will turn up at some time to help us out. I have an old mother to take care

Digitized by Google

of, and I cannot neglect her at present to get married, for I only make ten dollars a week, and a man can't marry on that, at least not such a woman as Griselle.' 'But you never expect to get any more,' I said grimly. 'Oh, yes, I do,' he replied. 'If I had a little capital just now, I'd go to Spelldown and set up for myself. The wheelwright of that place has just died.' 'How much capital would it take?' I asked, with cold irony. 'About six hundred dollars,' he said frankly. 'I tried to borrow it of Gabe Hotchkiss, but he said that the man who married his niece ought to be able to make his own way without coming to him, and he was right.'"

"Well, well, well," said the Doctor. "How much more of this is there? You gloated over the poor fellow's helplessness, and then triumphed over the girl like an anthropoid ape."

"Yes. I asked him if he was in business for himself, if he would immediately get married, and he said he would. He even insulted me by letting his eye sparkle a little."

"Well, well, have done with it — you smashed your poor rival with his own poverty."

"No, I didn't."

"Well, what did you do?"

"I lent him the six hundred dollars."

"What —"

"I told him that one gentleman could do another a good turn when it was in his way, without being paid for it."

The Doctor looked into the fire a moment.

Digitized by Google

He did not like to acknowledge that I had the turn on him, and that he had blown off a great deal more steam than was necessary. "I'll just get these heavy boots off," he said.

"Do," I replied, "and drop all the other things that annoy you at the same time. I haven't quite relinquished my grip on my own waistband."

Dear old leviathan! He never was so majestically human as during the next hour. He was unreservedly proud, I could see, although he tried to hide it, that his patient had not made a monkey of himself, as he called it. He advised me to read the story of "Undine," and slapped me on the back once or twice before he was quite aware of it, and pulled out new jack-knives and things from his capacious overcoat pocket for Charlie. When he was comfortably spread out before the fire, he brought forth a city newspaper.

"There may be a bit of good news in it," he said. "Look at the quotations. If you had disappointed me, I'll be hanged if I wouldn't have carried it back without telling you."

I uttered a note of surprise. "Why, the Esmeralda is up in the clouds — twenty points."

"Yes, so I see. If you had stayed in the market, you'd have sold out. It is like one of those letters of Napoleon's that he did not open. It answered itself, and it's so with a good many other things."

I was figuring on the margin of the paper, and did not heed him.

Digitized by Google

"Trying to calculate the amount of anxiety and stress you've missed?" he asked.

"No, I was figuring the gain. It's a pretty nice lump."

"I congratulate you," he said. "When a man can plant his mining stock as the farmer plants his turnips, and doesn't worry, the stock-market will be as healthful as a truck-garden."

I did not exult very much. Somebody had somewhere said that good luck always comes to a man when he has lost the zest for it. I did not seem to care so much just at that moment. The good news seemed belated and somehow slightly trivial.

But the Doctor was exuberant. "I withdraw my prescription," he said. "You shall go back with me. I think I can trust you now even in the jaws of Wall Street."

"I'm in no hurry," I replied. "Gabe brought me over a bunch of winter carnations this morning. They were white. It was like a message of high esteem, and I think I'll stay over and stand up with that young wheelwright. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Doctor. I will eat dinner with you at your own house on Easter, if you will promise not to lecture."

We sat there and talked it all over, and the Doctor slowly drew out of me an acknowledgment of moral convalescence. He said I had put on sandals and walked with the mysteries. I dare say he was right. I can only tell how Nature had affected a stranger who took her in

Digitized by Google

and entertained her unawares. Some of her Darks, as Carlyle calls them, have lightened a little under an equable internal flame. Her horizons are so wide and her balances so perfect, that I do not see how the apothecary observer can help laying aside his small scales, and paying tribute to the immeasurable equilibriums and purposes, or avoid arriving at the serene acknowledgement of a league-less Somewhat to which a universe of things is tending. That he will, if he gives up a little to Nature, become either a Pantheist with some of the philosophers, or a mere gatherer like some of the savants, it is not for me to say. But I feel confident that a healthy adjustment of faculties, and the suspension of an aggressive egotism, put a man *en rapport* with new harmonies that he never before suspected. If he walk in the cordial but silent woods, he finds that the defiance goes out of his vertebræ, and he is acquiring the bowed head; and if we look narrowly here we shall find, I think, that the bowed head of the savant and the saint are the tokens of a similar but unequal humility. These conclusions bore into one's old timbers unobserved like the teredo, when one lives apart from his fellows for a while; so that I grew to think with the Doctor, that it was good for every man to have hermit hours, and to keep a wilderness somewhere into which he can escape from himself. In such sequestered moments tides of soft intimations come from afar, and there are apt to be astral banners fluttering in one's out-reach — whisperings of origins and outcomes,

Digitized by Google

never before heard in the soft procession of the universes; faint, kindly voices reaching up from the lowliest processes, trying to speak of kinship and fatherhood. There are new and tiny links far down the inscrutable depths, and they glitter in the gloom with threads of promise, forever weaving the continuity and indestructibility of life in a majestic synthesis.

I think it is an unforced similitude to say that I came to Nature very much as a recreant son is carried on a litter to his old mother. I had a generous contempt for the "old woman" who did not know as much as I did. But her homely balms put me on my feet. I grew insensibly to perceive that some bereavements are not blows but benisons; and as my physical system re-adjusted itself, my moral apprehension took on a keener edge. That is all.

All that I have been telling here took place well along into February. The Doctor went back, and there were days of dull imprisonment when we were encompassed by the acrid storms of the season. Rain and snow and sleet; with the thermometer lurking stubbornly at zero, and the monotony of it all becoming unbearable. But let me say without any boasting that I was strangely cheerful, if not jolly, under it all — with some kind of inner complacency that was like a new vital spring. Something had gone out of my life, but the vacuum was filled by something new that had come into it. What it was, I can hardly find words to tell. "When the spring comes, we

Digitized by Google

will go back," I had said to Charlie. And how we longed for it. The season seemed to have stuck fast while we watched the sunshine on the wall, and there were long days when there was no sunshine. But there were little premonitions. The inhabitants under the floor were getting more lively, and then one night we heard that *peep, peep* from the pond, — the first stir of life in the warming earth.

It was in March that the announcement was officially made. The Doctor had sent me a thin little book of Maurice Thompson's, and one verse of his tells the whole story as nobody else can tell it: —

> "I heard the woodpecker pecking,
> The sapsucker tenderly sing;
> I turned and looked out of my window,
> And lo, it was spring."

What more have I to tell you? Our idyl of exile was done. We were to go away, taking with us some soft memories of happy hours and sacred companionship, inwrought, at least for me, with some gracious lessons.

One morning we stood on the platform at the Spelldown station, watching the men put our boxes into the baggage-car. A soft breeze came down from the direction of the Hotchkiss woods, bringing, I thought, the odour of the swelling rose vines and lilac bushes. Lilacs. It gave me a little momentary twinge. Then I straightened myself, and tried to whistle a bit of the hymn "Onward,

Digitized by Google

Christian Soldiers," but I didn't know it, and I fancy it ran into "Listen to the Mocking-bird."

"Come on, Comrade," I said. "Let us say good-by to the country and get aboard."

When we were seated in the car, Charlie pointed through the window with his finger. Men and boys were moving about in careless and animated groups; and at one corner of the platform, quite alone, was the yellow dog, — the most woebegone picture of canine neglect and grief I ever saw. Her head drooped, her tail hung limp, and she was wrapped in her own desolation. Charlie impulsively cried out, "Good-by, Lilah," and the sound striking against the depot made the dog turn her head, cock her ears, and wag her tail as she expectantly looked for the familiar owner of the voice; then realizing that it was an illusion, she walked wearily away.

This was a little too much for me. I went out, called to her, and when she came gladly, I took her by the back of the neck, put her into the baggage-car, and gave the baggageman a dollar.

And so my last act was to interfere with the nature of things, for the yellow dog came to the city with us.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google